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Language and identity in a cross-cultural context : an exploratory study.

Isabella, Halsted
University of Massachusetts Amherst

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

By

ISABELLA HALSTED

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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This work is dedicated to the children of Anya, Marvina, Nzamba, Rebeca and Ruth; and to Benjamin, Ilana, Jonathan Lydia, Matt and Yali; and to all of their sisters, brothers, and cousins, North, South, East, West and along the Equator.

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discouraging moments.

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ABSTRACT

Language and Identity in a Cross-Cultural Context:

An Exploratory Study

September 1981

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Directed by: Professor David Kinsey

This study concerns the cross-cultural experience of persons who learn the language of a dominant/prestige culture but are from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Its purpose is to explore the nature, interaction, and significance of factors which may affect language learning and personal or cultural identity in this process. In contrast to current behaviorist views and mechanistic practices in language education, this study assumes that an enriched awareness and understanding of the complexities involved in such language learning will indicate what needs to be considered by educators in order to improve language mastery as well as personal and cultural integration.

Because of the preliminary state of knowledge about the language learning process in this context, the study is an intensive exploration of a limited number of personal cases. It was conducted through informal and open-ended interviews with six adult professionals--two each from Africa,

Asia and the United States. All of them are bi- or multilingual and are demonstrably successful by standards of Western education, but are originally from backgrounds outside the prestige culture in their respective societies.

The interviews focused on issues that are reflected in the organization of the study. Following an introductory overview of issues and needs, Chapter Two addresses the question of motivation as influenced by the perceptions of the dominant culture and expectations of the promise of education initially brought to the learning experience. Chapters Three and Four concern the nature of the learning experience as this affected language acquisition and cultural identity, in the context of contrastive out of school features. Chapter Five looks at the effect of the experience on self-identity in relation to mastery of the new language.

The concluding section of this study, Chapter Six, shifts perspective to what the educator brings to the cross-cultural learning situation and suggests the need for an examination of attitudes, objectives, and understandings. It points up specific problems for learners brought out by the study. Finally it suggests means by which the learner's own language and cultural and personal experience may be explored and affirmed in the course of learning the new language.

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C H A P T E R I

ISSUES AND APPROACH: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

The need for a better understanding of the complexities and influences involved in second-language learning is particularly acute in the 1980's. Traditional approaches to language teaching ignore the range and dynamics of factors that not only influence language learning itself but also the personal and cultural development of the learner. Rather than moving ahead with a broader sensitivity and pedagogical adaptation to such factors, current trends in second language education point backwards to an emphasis on the "Basics" only.

Both in the United States and elsewhere, there is recognition that language is a political issue, and that quality education in the language of the dominant culture for those outside it is an essential factor in the struggle for social equality. In this country, the issue has been given particular emphasis and attention since the mid-sixties, in response to the burgeoning demands by linguistic and ethnic minorities for equal opportunity in the schools. In newly independent countries in the Third World, there has been growing interest in the reform of inherited colonial

systems of education, their narrow and problematic approaches to language education and their perpetration of colonial attitudes.[1]

Recognition of the multidimensional importance of language, affecting as it does social mobility, cultural and personal identity, is implicit in the concerns expressed by those who call for quality education. To quote James Baldwin:

> It goes without saying...that language is a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: it reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity. There have been times and places, when to speak a certain language could be dangerous, even fatal. Or, one may speak the same language, but in such a way that one's antecedents are revealed, or (one hopes) hidden.[2]

Research into language issues over the past decade challenges the established perspectives held by linguists and language educators as having too narrowly understood the significance of language in the human experience. Among linguists, Noam Chomsky has made important contributions to the understanding of language structure and the affirmation of the universal capacity of humans to learn and create languages. But this and other approaches in structural linguistics have also led to a focus that ignores differences of social context and individual psychology that are

problems inherent in the process of language learning.* And in second-language education there has been focus on questions of language interference and contrastive structural features, concentrating on phonics, syntax, and vocabulary building. While this has led to an improvement over the mechanistic practices of traditional language teaching (drills, rote memorization, etc.) that ignore structural contrasts entirely, nevertheless the perspective excludes strategic extra-linguistic considerations.

For several years in this country there was a swing in the opposite direction, towards "relevant" education, social consciousness-raising and personal creativity that sometimes led to the rejection of structural considerations entirely. Then the flurry caused by "Why Johnny Can't Write" (or Read) produced a backlash in language education with a return to the "Basics", still with us today, where language and literacy are seen as skills to be learned like auto mechanics and sewing, and where, evidently, traditional

---

*Geneva Smitherman, writing on the controversial Ann Arbor case, summarizes the issue: "The classic dichotomy between langue and parole (loosely, speech and language) is evident in the differences between Chomskyian theoretical linguistics and Hymesian 'socially constituted' linguistics. The Chomsky school (1966,1972) abstracts language from social context and focuses on its structure--sound patterns, grammatical structure and vocabulary. The Hymes school (1974) more broadly conceptualizes language within the framework of culture and society, and focuses on the use and users of language: their history, culture, values, world views, and social structure are considered basic to understanding a given language."[3]

ways once again hold sway.* One sees a comparable thrust in adult literacy education for the Third World, where literacy for practical ends results in the neglect of far-reaching issues: political, cultural, and personal realities which relate to language itself and have an essential bearing on the learning process.**

Sociolinguistics views language in terms of its use, rather than its structure, and explores its dimensions as various "ways of speaking" (all of us are masters of many). By seeing language as a "human problem", the thrust of research in sociolinguistics has been ethnographic and multidisciplinary, investigating the many dimensions involved in how people develop and interrelate through language and how these are integral to the language learning experience. In so doing, it confronts the truth that language plays a central role in the dynamics of the total experience of individual development, and strategically in the specific experience of cross-cultural transition. Many factors that may seem to be external to language do in fact affect that experience. These include social, economic, and political

---

*Right off the press, from a respected professor of writing for minority youth in this country: "Some classes may not need two or three full sessions on sentence fragments. Other classes may depend on agreement or verb tenses long before these skills appear on the calendar."[4]

**A dissertation in progress by Willard D. Shaw, recognizes, instead, the need to consider such multiple factors in literacy program planning.[5]

factors, as well as particular family dramas that influence how a given individual responds in unique ways. Language is integral to these, being learned, both initially and throughout life, through social interaction in specific settings and being an essential means by which one perceives, interprets, and acts upon one's reality in turn. Suzanne Langer discusses language as a primary function of the distinctly human capacity for symbolization. She quotes Edward Sapir, who wrote that while language "may be looked upon as a symbolic system which reports or refers or otherwise substitutes for direct experience, it does not as a matter of actual behavior stand apart from or run parallel to direct experience but completely interpenetrates with it. . . . "[6]

Issues and Needs

Language and identity: social and individual context. Although current trends in sociolinguistic research are relatively recent, the relation of language to cultural context was long before explored extensively in the works of Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir.[7] The so-called "Whorf/Sapir hypothesis" suggests that the structure of a language in a given culture might shape the perception of reality by speakers of those languages. Recently Basil B. Bernstein turned the equation around, showing how the cultural context itself--particularly social class structure--determines

"fashions of speaking" and ways of thinking about the world. He has demonstrated that persons of lower class or uneducated families have access only to "restricted" or personalistic modes of communication, while those of the middle class, with advanced schooling, have access to both restricted and "elaborated" codes. Thus, his point is that for some, the lack of access to quality education results in the perpetuation of social inequalities in that the ability to express oneself through formal and elaborated means, as well as having access to universalistic meanings, is necessary for attaining social power.[8] His work has stimulated much debate among linguists and cognitive psychologists concerned with language and thought development.[9]

A related and equally important area of study has been the connection between oral cultures and the development of thought or communication modes, in comparison with those of literate cultures. The transmission of knowledge through the spoken word in oral cultures has different effects than when this occurs through written language. Literacy alters the logic of thought and access to historical fact, as well as the relation between self-concept and cultural identity. These dimensions have been explored variously by such thinkers as Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole et al., Paulo Freire, James Goody and Ian Watt,

and Walter Ong.*

Such studies on the cultural context of language have great significance for language educators in underlining the direct and integral connection between language and cultural identity. The connection has clear implications for the individual learner, who both is affected by it and affects it in turn.

The psycho-social conceptualization of identity that underlies this study incorporates the complex dynamics within the individual that occur between the inner and outer worlds of experience. Sapir describes the relationship between individual and social context as follows:

> A personality is carved out by the subtle interaction of those systems of ideas which are characteristic of the culture as a whole, as well as of those systems of ideas which get established for the individual through more special types of participation, with the physical and psychological needs of the individual organism, which cannot take over any of the cultural material that is offered in its original form but works it over more or less completely so that it integrates with those needs. . . . The more closely we study this interaction, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish society as a cultural and psychological unit from the individual who is thought of as a member of the society to whose culture he is required to adjust. No problem of social psychology that is

---

*Freire, for example, writes: "To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate these techniques in terms of consciousness. . . . Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables--lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe--but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context."10

> at all realistic can be phrased by starting with the conventional contrast of the individual and his society.11

So while all development and growth, in large part fostered through language, is determined by the social context--we are social beings fundamentally--, the process is not only "interactional" but "intrapersonal". Learning and the development of selfhood takes place through a complex process of internalization and transformation of outer experience in relation to psychic needs and drives.

Language is the means by which one "names the world", and as such is a principal vehicle through which cultural norms are internalized--at first in the family, then in the broader social context. However, there is no simple connection between such outer givens and how these are taken in by the individual. Such "naming" is always accompanied by feelings which help to control how the world in fact comes to be perceived and how our developing consciousness of self relates to the world. Through language we refine and develop thought and can become reflective and critical thinkers. The realization of the cognitive potential directly depends on motivation and contextual factors. Furthermore, Lili E. Peller, noting the complexity of the "inner" and "outer" dynamic, points out that language

> . . . deepens greatly our awareness and knowledge of our inner world and the two developments are interdependent . . . the acquisition of language activates the child's latent ability to bestow conceptual order

> on his experience. This development changes a child's whole existence; it is by no means restricted to his intellectual growth. . . . Language brings tremendous enrichment to all inner life, to the affects we experience as well as to our thought processes.[12]

The work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner with Maori children in New Zealand recognized the importance of the inner life in helping to determine meaning and influencing the course of language learning; it also stressed the potential of language in providing access to that inner life. "Education," she says, "is the increase of the percentage of the conscious in relation to the unconscious. It must be a developing idea."[13]

Needs for considering the connection of language and identity. Because language and identity are thus so intimately connected, it would seem that there would be little need to draw attention to the fact. However, as has been pointed out, language education, like established linguistics, tends to ignore or oversimplify problems that inhere in any language learning situation by focusing primarily on structural matters. It would seem particularly important to consider identity where language learning requires of the learner a radical departure into a new language and a new culture.

Pedagogical needs. Mastery of a language, in both spoken and written forms, means the ability to use it in multiple ways, for multiple purposes, and with a variety

of audience. It also implies that the language may be used for the expression of particular experience and for individual psychological growth. If mastery is the objective, it may be asserted that effective learning of the language is best attained when the "whole person" is involved. To use the current lingo, teachers must "start where the learner is". Approaches to teaching language and literacy that ignore the psychology and cultural background of the learner tend to fall far short of the mark. One can of course become linguistically facile in more than one's first language; mastery is quite a different matter.

Moral considerations. If, in the course of language transition, the learner is led towards psychological alienation rather than towards an increasingly integrated and creative self, this is a form of violence that has moral implications. Ali A. Mazrui discusses this in reference to the uses of English on the African continent: "Where English conquers the black man as effectively as he was once conquered by the Anglo-Saxon race, tensions between dignity and linguistic nationality are unavoidable."[14] There are socio-political implications when psychological alienation occurs. As has been extensively discussed by a number of writers on the subject, alienated, or "centerless" individuals are often those who most effectively perpetrate the status quo in unequal societies.[15] One of those interviewed in this study refers to such people as "puppets" and

"semi-literates".

Cultural adaptation and maintenance. Integration into the prestige culture, in the sense of going beyond "coping skills" and achieving true viability in that culture, does not come with the abandonment or repression of one's own. Sapir notes that "adjustment" is "a superficial concept because it regards only the end product of individual behavior as judged from the standpoint of the requirements, real or supposed, of a particular society." A more complex and meaningful conception of the process

> . . . includes, obviously, those accommodations to the behavior requirements of the group without which the individual would find himself isolated and ineffective, but it includes, just as significantly, the effort to retain and make felt in the opinions and attitudes of others that particular cosmos of ideas and values which has grown up more or less unconsciously in the experience of the individual. Ideally these two adjustment tendencies need to be compromised into behavior patterns which do justice to both requirements.
>
> It is a dangerous thing for the individual to give up his identification with such cultural patterns as have come to symbolize for him his own personality integration. . . .[16]

Wallace E. Lambert and Joshua A. Fishman have asserted that for successful achievement and maintenance of both bilingualism and biculturalism there must be strong affirmation and positive feelings about both the original and the new cultures.[17]

In addition, there is value to the maintenance of cultures per se. Without arguing for "cultural purity" (of which there is no such thing), or that "all cultures are equally good", I assume that the preservation of the

traditions, literature,and language of cultures is important, and that cultural diversity provides richness. If the education of persons from cultures other than the dominant or mainstream one results in their growing sepation from knowledge or appreciation of their own, then how are these to be preserved? This is an ongoing concern of many persons from other linguistic backgrounds and non-dominant cultures who write in English. They have made the commitment to bending the language to "bear the burden of my experience" (to use James Baldwin's phrase) and to more accurately reflect the characteristic modes of thought and expression of their original cultures.*

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*For Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist, the challenge is to find ways to produce the thought and style of the oral tradition while using English. He gives an example from his novel, Arrow of God. Here the Chief Priest is speaking:

> "I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow."

Achebe compares this to how the same message would sound in conventional standard English:

> "I am sending you as my representative among those people--just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight."

"The material is the same," writes Achebe. "But the form of the one is in character and the other is not."[18]

Promise of bilingual bicultural integration. The potential benefits of bilingual bicultural integration are considerable, though realities may serve to impede their full realization. A few examples of possible such benefits may be noted.

Pragmatic mobility. The pragmatic value of learning the dominant language is obvious in unequal societies, where the "outsider" must acquire the prestige language, and literacy in it, if he or she hopes to gain access to the benefits of the dominant culture. Recognition of this fact is the prime motivation for seeking to acquire the language. However, for many reasons other than linguistic, be they greed, ethnocentrism, or racism, full admission into that culture may be denied the "outsider". This is as true in the United States, where ideologically there is promise of "equal opportunity for all", as in colonial societies where economic and social hierarchies are overtly recognized and often jealously maintained.

Psychological breadth and liberation. The achievement of bilingualism and bicultural identity can have significant effect on how one perceives the world and oneself in it--apart from one's ability to get around in it. Dell Hymes writes of the limitations of the world view of the monolingual, who has a "sense of unlimited adequacy . . . which, being unreflecting, may confine him all the more." He quotes Sapir on this: "It is the appreciation of the relativity of the form of thought which results from

linguistic study that is perhaps the most liberalizing about it. What fetters the mind and benumbs the spirit is ever the dogged acceptance of absolutes."[19]

Social attitudes. In his many studies of bilingualism in Canada and the United States, Lambert has explored the positive social effects--as well as the conflicts--that appear. He believes that bilingualism may lead to the transcendence of ethnocentric attitudes and a healthy appreciation of the basic similarities among diverse peoples:

> My argument is that bilinguals, especially those with bicultural experiences, enjoy certain fundamental advantages which, if capitalized on, can easily offset the annoying social tugs and pulls they are normally prone to . . . the child brought up bilingually and biculturally will be less likely to have good versus bad contrasts impressed on him when he starts wondering about himself, his own group and others. Instead he will probably be taught something more truthful, although more complex: that differences among national or cultural groups of people are actually not clear-cut and that basic similarities among peoples are more prominent than differences. The bilingual child in other words may well start life with the enormous advantage of having a more open, receptive mind about himself and other people. Furthermore, as he matures, the bilingual has many opportunities to learn from observing changes in other people's reactions to him, how two-faced and ethnocentric others can be. That is, he is likely to become especially sensitive to and leery of ethnocentrism."[20]

If the world holds out little promise for social change, Lambert's optimistic view of change at the individual level reminds us that the so-called "marginal" person, sometimes held in suspicion for "speaking in many tongues", may have understandings and perspectives superior to those of others.

To realize such promise, there are clearly many factors to be considered if language teaching and the learning experience in the cross-cultural setting are to move towards both better mastery and improved personal and cultural integration. With given constraints there is, of course, much that a language educator can do little about. Nevertheless, an understanding of the nature, interaction and significance of influences that come to bear on language learning and individual development can positively affect progress towards such ends.

Purpose and Approach of the Study

This study is concerned with the cross-cultural experience of persons who learn the language of a dominant/prestige culture but are from linguistic and cultural backgrounds outside of that culture. Its immediate purpose is to explore the nature, interaction and significance of factors which appear to affect language learning and personal or cultural identity in this process. With an enriched awareness and understanding of such factors, the ultimate goal is to identify what needs to be considered by educators to improve language teaching in such cross-cultural settings.

Because of the preliminary state of knowledge about this process and its complexities, the approach of this study is exploratory and focuses on an intensive investigation of a limited number of personal cases in specific contexts.

As Hymes has pointed out:

> Inference as to the shaping effect of some one language on thought and the world must be qualified immediately in terms of the place of the speaker's language in his biography and mode of life. Moreover, communities differ in the roles they assign to language itself in socialization, acquisition of cultural knowledge, and performance. Community differences extend to the role of languages in naming the worlds they help to shape or constitute.[21]

Consequently, consistent with the current emphasis in sociolinguistics on ethnographic study as a means towards better understanding the language learning experience, I have chosen to interview six persons who, in various ways, typified the central problem. The interviews were informal, far-ranging, and open-ended, with the basic purpose of exploring the complexities of cultural and linguistic transition in light of the social, political and personal dimensions of the individual lives.

The Case Studies

The people I interviewed are professional educators from Africa, Asia and the United States*, all of them bi- or multilingual, and all demonstrably successful in meeting the goals and standards of Western education. None of them

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*Because they all preferred anonymity for personal and sometimes political reasons, I have been constrained to disguise some of the countries from which they came. In generalizing by continent, I do not mean to underplay the very important cultural and historical differences between countries, which factors influenced the experience and perceptions of each person.

are originally from social and cultural backgrounds of the dominant or prestige culture in their societies. For all, the first language they learned and spoke at home was a vernacular not officially recognized or rewarded by the dominant culture, whose language was a variety of standard English (British or American). Although levels of education in their communities, and specifically their immediate surroundings (parents, extended family) varied considerably, only one came from parentage with more than primary level education. Economic level varied from what one of them describes as "lower middle class" to extreme poverty. For all, education and the learning of English held special meaning, and acquiring these involved significant departure from their primary worlds of experience and identification.

NZAMBA and RUTH are from countries in East and Southern Africa, respectively, which at the time of their growing up were under British colonial rule. Their education was controlled by American missionaries in conjunction with government-mandated systems. NZAMBA's community was virtually nonliterate, and education a rare and expensive privilege; RUTH, who is fifteen years younger, was of a second-generation: her parents had both received several years of schooling and had been Christianized. Schooling, while still privilege, was more accessible in her country and in her time. NZAMBA left his country and came to the United States for college and graduate study; at present

he is a professor of African studies at a large urban university here and returns to Africa each summer. RUTH attended an international university in a neighboring country and after several years of teaching and research work, she also came to the United States for graduate study. At present, she is completing doctoral work in cross-cultural studies and intends to return to her country thereafter.

ANYA and PHYL are from two Asian countries with long histories of colonial domination by different European powers. For each of them, although their countries had very recently achieved national independence, educational systems were still colonialist in nature. Each attended public government schools at the primary level and, at the secondary level, switched to more prestigious schools, ANYA to the so-called "English schools" that led directly to the University, PHYL to a private boarding school run by European nuns. ANYA's family had little education and was lower class; PHYL's family was more highly educated, and by her description "lower middle class". ANYA completed university work and became a teacher at the university; she left her country for the first time two years ago to do doctoral work in the United States. PHYL joined a convent, after completing the university, received a Master's degree in social work, taught in the rural areas, and then came to the United States for doctoral work, which she has completed.

MARVINA, a black American, and REBECA, Hispanic from Puerto Rico, are minorities in the society of the United States, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds distinct from that of the majority, mainstream culture. Schooling for both of them was public, compulsory, and controlled by Anglo systems and perspectives. MARVINA grew up in the poorest section of a small city in the South, attending all black schools until she received a National Scholarship Award, and went North to college. After several years of work in education in the South, she returned North to do doctoral work in counseling. REBECA grew up in a small hill town in Puerto Rico, her father a rural farm-worker. At fifteen, she left for New York, where she attended high school for a semester, then married and spent the next several years working in factories. She returned to college, went on to graduate school, and is now completing doctoral work in Guidance Counseling and Bilingual Bicultural education.

Family interrelationships in the case of each of these persons are extremely important in understanding their experience; how large the families were and their place in it, as well as their being male (Nzamba) or female (all the others) are equally important. My own limited knowledge of the cultural significance attached to such factors prevents me from doing more, in the case studies as presented here, than pointing these out, except where

they themselves discuss it.

The fact that the people I interviewed are personal acquaintances, as well as colleagues, has permitted the kind of open and responsive nature of conversation that is essential to exploring such personal issues that the multi-dimensions of my concern require. And because of their own professional concern with education--all of them, incidentally, working or planning to work with persons whose problems in cross-cultural experience are similar to their own--, their knowledge and analytic perspectives have contributed greatly to clarifying problems raised in the study.

The Interviews

I met with each person three times, for two hours each, and subsequently, in the course of the writing of the study, returned to them to clarify certain points, to check for factual accuracy, and, as the accounts finally took form, to have their reactions ("Does this seem like you?").

The interviews themselves focused on three main areas: (1) the person's background--family, cultural community, societal setting, the historical moment--and the original motivation for learning English and becoming educated; (2) the experience of learning the language in the full context, including the contrast between school and home cultures in their various aspects; (3) their reflections today concerning that experience, their view of

benefits and losses and their recommendations in retrospect for how things might be different. While the interview sessions focused on these three areas respectively, aspects of each of course came up in every session.

Out of these conversations emerged a number of significant issues that gave life, fullness, and particular slant to dimensions that are explored in the literature about the subject. They pointed up the complexity of the experience and suggested variables that help to shape the unique form it takes for the given individual.

Terminology

A major difficulty of this study has been to attempt to deal with the experiences of people I interviewed without falling into the kind of dichotomies that seem inherent in the English language and the Western analytic/academic approach. Terms such as "bicultural" or "bilingual" suggest that there exist two distinct cultures/languages and that a "bilingual" person somehow balances these two in his or her head, or treads two cultures, "bridging" them. The concept of "transition" again suggests motion <u>from</u> one place <u>to</u> the next. We tend to describe cultures as distinct and polar, to pit the individual against social forces, to speak of development as sequential, and of certain persons as "marginal"--that is, on the edge of some central place. These terms all run up against the realities of life

experience and only partially represent them. Throughout this study, there has been tension between the terminology and the reality: while having to dichotomize and categorize, I do so at the very time that my purpose is rather to suggest that language teachers must appreciate the complexity, the simultaneous interweave of experience, which pertains most intimately in language learning.

However, as Lambert points out, such terms also reflect the tendency of society to so categorize groups: " . . . so many of us think in terms of in-groups and out-groups, or of the need of showing an allegiance to one group or another, . . . that terms such as own language, other's language, leaving and entering one cultural group for another seem to be appropriate, even natural, descriptive choices."[22] The kind of "in-group"/"out-group" thinking we tend to do, and the stereotyping that goes with it, may be an important barrier to overcome, rather than perpetuated, in the course of the language learning situation.

Just as such terms need to be questioned in light of the force they carry in perpetuating attitudes, in an opposite sense, terms such as "prestige", "dominant" and "nondominant" must instead be emphasized as representing social and political realities. It is necessary to use and explain them because to a certain extent, in this country, they are taboo. It goes against the grain of the American myth of equal opportunity to recognize that there are power

structures and prestige factors mandated by these--a problem that does not exist elsewhere. I use the term "dominant" culture to refer to that social group in any society that controls economic and political power, and determines "prestige" by setting standards of success by its own measure, one of these being performance in its own language, the "prestige language". In colonial countries, the dominant culture is a minority group; in the United States, it is a majority. The force of its power to control economic and social mobility remains the same.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized in a series of chapters which highlight different aspects of the experience that are in fact closely interwoven in reality. While the thematic focus in each chapter is distinct, and each follows logically upon the other, the rich and diverse material from the interviews is used in a flexible manner. Always bringing these in to illustrate and give depth to a given issue, I often felt the need to provide full context to that issue as it was relevant to a person's experience. It happened that one person might have been very expansive on a given subject, while another remembered less about it or gave no importance to it; in fact, it may have had little relevance to her life.

Overall, presentation of the material within the

framework of the problem has been a process that has reminded me of rug-weaving: one has an intractable loom, an idea or pattern in one's mind, and a basketful of many colored and textured balls of wool which, as they come to be brought together take on unknown and surprising character, subtly altering the pattern in ways one could never have predicted. It is a classic tension between form, meaning, and the raw material of life--one which, after all, this study is centrally about.

Chapter Two, BACKGROUNDS, addresses the question of motivation for education and learning the English language as it is influenced by: the perceived value of these by persons not belonging to the prestige culture; the accessibility of education for such persons; personal imperatives for education and language-learning as influenced by family perspectives and aspirations. The chapter provides description of social setting and historical/political events and gives personal biographical information as all of these affect the learning experience.

Chapter Three, LANGUAGE ACQUISITION, explores the ways that each person acquired the prestige language and their influence on mastery of the language as indicated by habitual use, modes of communication, and sense of confidence when using the language. Here accounts by Anya, Marvina and Rebeca are given extensive exploration.

Chapter Four, LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY,

considers the ways that the schooling experience transmitted the ideology, values, and thought/structure of the new culture through the school environment, teachers' attitudes, the curriculum and content, and styles of interaction. These are seen against the out of school culture of the learner. The degree of cultural integration involved is reflected in the person's sense of cultural identification. Extensive discussion of Nzamba's experience is provided, followed by comparison with those of Ruth and Phyl regarding particular issues raised.

Chapter Five, LANGUAGE AND SELF-IDENTITY, considers the persons' sense of themselves in relation to their mastery of language. The key issues are sense of authenticity and how the experience fostered or hindered development of an integrated personality. As one person said, "the demand is to be able to fit in both worlds, to be yourself without being artificial."

Chapter Six, SIGNIFICANCE FOR EDUCATORS, answers the question: "Given the complexities and variety of influences involved in learning the dominant language in cross-cultural contexts, what can a teacher do to foster psychological and cultural integration and effective mastery of the new language?" Teachers' own perspectives, backgrounds, and objectives are looked at here, and recommendations concerning approaches are provided, in the context of issues brought up by the rest of the study.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Ali A. Mazrui, The Political Sociology of Language (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975).

[2]James Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, The Tell Me, What is?", New York Times, 29 July 1979, p. 19.

[3]Geneva Smitherman, "What Go Round, Come Round: King in Perspective," Harvard Educational Review, 51 (February, 1981): 45. Also see Dell Hymes, "Speech and Language: On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Speakers," in Language as a Human Problem, eds. Einar Haugen and Morton Bloomfield (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), pp. 45-72.

[4]Harvey Weiner, The Writing Room: A Resource Book for Teachers of English (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 249.

[5]Willard D. Shaw, "Planning for National Literacy" (Ed.d dissertation in progress, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1981).

[6]Edward Sapir, Culture, Language and Personality (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1949), p. 159, quoted in Suzanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 126.

[7]Among their many writings, see Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1956) and Sapir, ibid.

[8]Basil B.Bernstein, Class, Codes and Control, Vol. I (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971). His writing appear in many anthologies, including those cited in the bibliography to this study.

[9]For a summary discussion of the dispute and for interpretations of his work, see Hymes, pp. 45-72, and Jerome Bruner and Michael Cole, "Cultural Differences and Inferences about Psychological Processes," American Psychologist 26(1971): 867-876. William Labov challenged the implication that lower class children were incapable of "thinking abstractly". See William Labov, Language in the Inner City (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), or any number of selections from his work in anthologies cited in the bibliography.

[10]Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 48. Also see Bruner and Cole; Michael Cole et al., The Cultural Context of Learning and Thinking (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in Language and Social Context, ed. Pier Paolo Giglioli (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 311-357; and Walter J. Ong, "Oral Culture and the Literate Mind," in Minority Language and Literature, ed. Dexter Fisher (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1977), pp. 134-149.

[11]Sapir, pp. 157-158.

[12]Lili E. Peller, "Freud's Contribution to Language Theory," paper delivered at fall meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, New York, December, 1964, p. 468.

[13]Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Teacher (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), p. 176.

[14]Mazrui, p. 77.

[15]For example: Ashton-Warner; Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Mazrui; Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (Boston: The Orion Press, 1965).

[16]Sapir, p. 159.

[17]Wallace E. Lambert, Language, Psychology and Culture, ed. Anwar S. Dil (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1972); Joshua A. Fishman and Erika Leuders-Salmon, "What has the Sociology of Language to Say to the Teacher? On Teaching the Standard Variety to Speakers of Dialectal or Sociolectal Varieties," in Functions of Language in the Classrooms, eds. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), pp. 67-83 and other writings.

[18]Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," in Mazrui, Appendix 3, p. 222.

[19]Sapir, pp. 153-157, quoted in Hymes, p. 60.

[20]Lambert, pp. 230-231.

[21]Hymes, p. 60.

[22]Lambert, p. 230.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUNDS

Introduction

Motivation is a key factor among the many that influence how a person outside the prestige culture learns the new language and adapts to the new culture. Of course, motivation will be affected in the course of learning by the attitudes of the school towards the original culture and language of the learner. However, the attitudes that the learner brings to the learning situation in the first place will be basic to how well he or she succeeds. These attitudes are shaped initially by parents and the original community. It is generally agreed that where there is strong motivation to join a new culture and identify with it, there will be heightened probability of success in learning the language of that culture.

Studies regarding bilingualism biculturalism have shown that an integrative motivation--that accompanied by positive feelings towards the new language and culture and a desire to integrate with it--is far more likely to have good results than an instrumental one--namely, the pragmatic intention to acquire the benefits, but not the

cultural attributes, carried by the language.* The two types of motivation, however, are far from simple. They hinge on one's sense of place and pride in one's own culture, on the support given by one's culture as well as the place and stability of one's culture within the larger scheme.** Where nondominant groups are socially stigmatized and denied status and power in the society, there may be little realistic hope of being accepted into the dominant culture, and thus one's motivation may be instrumental at best. On the other hand, it is equally possible that a member of such a group might instead accept such negative judgments and strive to reject his own, to become part of the other and to integrate with it.***

Motivation, then, is contingent on social and

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*Wallace E. Lambert summarizes the results of many studies done by himself and others to this effect. It should be pointed out, too, that the "integrative" motivation also results in certain psychological problems, particularly as the bilingual moves close to integrating with the new culture.1

**In a recent paper Joshua A. Fishman discussed his study of a variety of bilingual schools in New York: American children learning French; Greek, Armenian and Chinese immigrants learning English; Jewish chidren learning Hebrew. There were "no fundamental problems" in acquiring biliteracy for these. Thus, he concluded, "acquisition and retention of biliteracy requires two cultures." The problems lie outside--where social class discrimination and racial prejudice undermine the stability of a given cultural community, there will not the same support.2

***In psychoanalytic terms, this process is called "incorporation of the negative ideal", and is discussed extensively by, for example, Erik Erickson and Frantz Fanon.3

political realities specific to a given society. It is also affected by the imperatives and aspirations of one's immediate community--and these may be contradictory. As we shall see later in this chapter, Marvina's mother wanted her to "be somebody"; her father wanted her to learn the means to confront the white man; she herself says she saw education as a means for sheer survival. Similarly, Anya's father "valued education highly", her mother "never understood", and her relatives were deeply antagonistic to all that the English school represented. Looking at these conflicting interests in either case, it is difficult to speak of their personal motivation as either "integrative" or "instrumental" in any pure sense. For the individual, many sometimes conflicting messages will influence attitudes she brings with her to the learning situation.

If attitudes towards the dominant culture will affect motivation, certainly expectations of what education and the dominant language will bring are equally important. That education holds great pragmatic value for "outsiders" is often insufficiently appreciated by persons from the dominant culture. Teachers like myself who, some years ago, worked with good faith in an urban community in this country, or well-intended missionaries such as the European nuns in Phyl's school, a matron from Wisconsin in Southern Africa, a British settler teaching in a boy's boarding school in East Africa, often lack that perception entirely. Thus I

remember that I was alarmed at City College in New York by some of the black counselors and teachers who were on the lookout for "missionary mentalities" among the rest of us. "Look," they would say, "your job is to teach these kids standard English, no more, no less! That's bread, man--don't give me that Humanistic stuff!" It took some time for me to open my eyes to the sheer difficulty my students had in making it to school, the poverty of the schools they had been to, and the considerable sacrifice that education entailed for them.

At the bottom line, there is no doubt that, for most of the people I interviewed, the economic motive was very important. However, it is also fairly clear that in no case were education and the language seen to be a matter of "bread" alone. A mystique takes over, and what education and the language symbolize to those without them is of equal importance.

There is often a discrepancy between the "real" promise offered by education and what I will call its "mythical" promise, that is, what the culture represents and what possibilities education seems to offer in the perceptions of those who are outside. The word "mythical" (borrowed from Nzamba) is appropriate in two senses: both because of the sometimes magical ways that these seemed to be so regarded, and also because so many factors other than education in unequal societies in fact work against full

admission into the dominant culture. There may be promise of economic betterment, of worlds opened up through literacy and knowledge, of shared status with the "haves", but the lie is there when the purposes of education from the standpoint of the dominant culture are otherwise. As Anya and Nzamba retrospectively interpret colonial education, the intention was to control "the natives" and to produce "semi-literates" to help as functionaries in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. It has been suggested by critics of the "American Dream" that schooling for the working classes was similarly designed to track them into appropriate jobs by instilling authoritarian attitudes of acceptance, while nevertheless holding out the promise of "equal opportunity for all."[4] Thus, while it was certainly true for all those interviewed that without education, one could not hope to better one's place, let alone in some cases, survive, it was also questionable whether all that was expected would likely be attained. The six people interviewed are all exceptional in what they did attain.

The connection of the dominant language with the myth is a logical extension of it. In all cases, there is the implicit, if often false, equation made that one is an educated person if one speaks the dominant language. Because the dominant language is spoken by the powerful, it is not simply the official language but the language of prestige. By the same token, one's own "other language" is

never simply a different form of communication, an equally serviceable instrument, but rather a reflection of one's "lesser" class, race, nationality, ethnic group--"lesser" where hierarchies of value are determined by the dominant culture. The world, and so often oneself, makes such identifications, much as a person is judged by the clothing she wears. It is this identification of the language one speaks with who and what one is that gives such particular urgency for the "outsiders" to learn the dominant language. Einar Haugen dwells on this at length, pointing out that "our problem is how to teach tolerance of difference and acceptance of a man for what he is, not for how he talks."[5]

Backgrounds and Perceptions

In presenting the backgrounds from which the six individuals came, I will set out what each of them says concerning what dominant culture, education and the prestige language meant to people from their communities, as well as the particular aspirations within their immediate families that influenced them individually as they went to school.

Because of broad similarities according to geographical background, I will group the six into three pairs. Within a pair, I will point up some contrasting viewpoints held by each, as well as individual differences in family background and personality. The difference in perceived experience between the Africans, the Asians, and the

Americans must be mentioned and will be developed further in this study. Colonial dominance in East and Southern Africa took different forms in part because of cultural and political differences; the two Asian countries are also radically different for historical reasons. The experiences of Hispanics and black Americans in the United States are only broadly comparable, and that primarily from the perspective of the dominant culture.

Africa: Nzamba and Ruth. Nzamba and Ruth both grew up in pre-independence, colonial societies in East Africa and Southern Africa, respectively. The dominant culture was represented by a numerical minority of foreigners of different race, language, and religion from the majority society, as well as by those few Africans who had already become assimilated into that culture through formal education. British colonists, with missionary support, controlled the formal education system, which was segregated. Education for Africans was "not universal, it was not compulsory, and it was not free." From the standpoint of the colonists, according to Nzamba today:

> The purpose of missionary education was to produce some semi-literate Africans who would help in the running of the government of semi-literate peoples as clerks, as messengers, secretaries, whatever was useful--as long as you know where to get some milk, where to get some groceries for the white man . . . Those guys were not going to teach us--are you kidding--to become lawyers!
> These people came to ruin us, divorce us from our cultures, for one very simple reason: control. Because

> once you uplift a man from his culture, his roots, then it's like a tree without roots, it's easier to manipulate him.

It is only much later that Nzamba would have this perception, however. At the time, the promise of education, from the viewpoint of the African, was immense: it implied becoming "rich" like the African elite; becoming literate in a country of majority illiteracy; becoming Christian among heathens; and above all, becoming "like a European". The mystique of the white European, which carried the desire to emulate him, is a mystery Nzamba cannot yet understand, but which he sees as fundamental to the aspirations of the would-be educated African:

> The thing that amazes me up to today is how one missionary, singlehandedly, would convince five thousand people in an area of ten thousand miles that the white man was right . . . and he was even using a whip! It's incredible, we believed them . . . that it was o.k. to change our names, it was just hip to be European and not to be us. How they got to our heads . . . it really disturbs me a lot.

Ruth points out that the same attitude holds just as much true today in her country, some years after independence:

> To a certain extent, people can be taught to understand other cultures. For example, an American or an Englishman going to my country should be prepared for the kind of pedestal he or she will be put on, simply by virtue of being white, American or British.

Nzamba, the schoolchild, fantasized:

> I'm going to be a lawyer <u>like</u> a European; I'm going to be a teacher <u>like</u> a European; I'm going to have a good house and drink tea and wear woolen suits <u>like</u> a European. I will speak English <u>like</u> a European. In other words, it all the time ended with this facsimile, this pretending, just trying to ally ourselves and look

> like Europeans. Obviously this was all in our heads. We couldn't be white. There was no way we could just pick up and go to Middlesex.

Education brought with it the promise of Christian salvation. Says Nzamba, "It was a Christian thing to do; it was real hip to be Christian and at the same time have your child grow up in the Christian tradition . . . which meant education." Ruth describes the same link:

> Even before my time, during my parents' time, when the first missionaries got there, one of the things they preached to us was that if you become Christian, you have to change your dress. If you saw somebody walking out there in traditional dress, you knew that they were heathen. Western clothes were a mark that you have moved from this way of living to another one: that you had accepted Christianity. Showing your body, for example in a traditional ceremony, meant that you were immoral and less educated.

The English language, like Western clothes, symbolized one's educated status, and speaking English "like a European" was imperative:

> Being educated is being able to speak English--those two more or less go along. . . . People will measure you by your control of the language, so much so that some will not think highly of you, even if you have a degree, if you cannot speak correctly, if you maybe say even a sentence wrong.
>
> In school, it was not just comprehension they were teaching us; it was not just being able to speak English our way; it was to speak it absolutely correctly [imitates British accent].

The appeal of literacy itself in nonliterate societies takes on an almost magical quality, as Nzamba's vivid story suggests:

I knew one guy by the name Mung'ei, long before I went

> to school, who used to write and read letters, and he was like a chief. There would be a long line of women and men holding letters from the city. They would split a piece of stick and put the letter in there, holding the stick upright. They wouldn't hold it in their hands; they thought that would make it dirty, and the white man's magic would disappear, so they would hold it very far away from them, until the magician who knew how to read the white magic would pluck it from the stick, open it, and read it. They would say, "This is incredible!"

Schoolchildren like Nzamba and Ruth would become the local scribes. Ruth tells of reading aloud the Bible to her grandparents, and Nzamba of his important role in the community, providing a link between country and city.

> When we could read, then women would be coming to us from all over the place, and we became famous: "Son of So and So can read and write!" We would write personal love letters. . . . Women were telling me their most secret views to their husbands and about their kids and I didn't understand half of it!*

Surely adding to the mystique of education was its relative inaccessibility. It was particularly true in Nzamba's time that educated Africans and converted Christians were a very small minority in a majority traditional culture. In Nzamba's own case, children whose parents could afford to send them to school were few in number. Also, he points out, most places in the schools were reserved for children of the colonial-appointed chiefs and sub-chiefs (the

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*A friend from Lesotho tells me that today this is common practice. Young primary school children read and write letters for families whose fathers have gone off to work in the South Africa mines, as well as for others who have either never gone to school or have left school early.

"puppets" and "stooges", as he calls them now) whom the government knew would serve them well. Thus his own father had to bribe the local sub-chief to get him into school. For Ruth, on the other hand, things were somewhat different.* She tells instead of schools that were relatively low-cost, and that in her area it was not unusual for children--especially girls--to be in school (boys went later, being required rather to tend cattle until a certain age). Thus one sees a difference in the ways that Nzamba and Ruth talk of the prestige factor in the attitudes they brought to school and how they felt as students. If Nzamba was "number one", Ruth says that she was "not particularly outstanding".

There is a significant difference, too, in the expectations and ambitions of their immediate families in sending them to school. For Nzamba, there was a complex of motives. His mother, only recently converted to Christianity, and a fanatic, insisted that he be schooled so as to save his soul; his father, a traditional doctor who was unschooled and not literate, nevertheless respected the value of learning and especially the "white man's magic",

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*Ruth points out that she is fifteen years younger--this fact accounts for a different view of events, in part, as well as difference in experience. She says that if I had instead interviewed a man from her country Nzamba's age, I would have heard a story more similar to his.

reading and writing. There was a precedent on his father's side of the family, a brother who had become a "Western doctor", having gone abroad to study. For Nzamba's uncle, education meant not only becoming learned, but achieving independence from the yoke of the white man.

For Ruth, on the other hand, there was little motivational contradiction in the reasons why her parents sent her to school, and in some ways little conflict for her in the experience of the school as contrasted with her background. Though her grandparents were not literate, they were Christian; her own mother and father had received what for their time was a high level of formal education. Thus there was little question that Ruth too would go to school; in fact the school she went to was the same one her mother had attended.

A major difference, though less easy to pinpoint, is the effect of political realities in each of the two societies at the times that Nzamba and Ruth were in school. In Nzamba's country in East Africa, along with the reverence for white authority and culture, there was also awareness of the brutalities of that culture and fear of that power. This was during the time of the struggle for independence, which was extremely violent. In Ruth's country, by contrast, when independence came, it was peaceable. Up to then, by her account, although the British held economic and political power, there was no hostility; there was rather, a prevailing

attitude of respect and tolerance. One can speculate, then, that each child brought with him/her to school a quite different feeling--for the one, ambivalence, for the other, little awareness of conflict.

Asia: Anya and Phyl. Both Anya and Phyl were in school only shortly after the achievement of national independence in their countries. Political power was thus no longer in the hands of the foreigners; however, the century and more of colonial dominance meant that the native elite who now controlled the school system were essentially colonized in attitude, spoke English in their homes, were well-versed in all that their own education had instilled in them. They valued Western culture, Western political ideology, and Western interpretations of the course of events.

Though the history of colonial dominance was very different in the two countries, the effects of colonization in the two cultures were similar. Anya says, "For an entire century and a half, it was like a dry period. We had nothing creative happen in science, literature, technology, nothing of our own." Phyl describes her country as "like an Indian reservation: when the foreigners came, they removed all the native culture. We lost our alphabet, our customs, we had no chance to create our own architecture, our own poetry . . . our culture was not transmitted in the schools." In both countries, English was the language used

both in the political/administrative world and in the educational system. Anya says that, historically, the colonizers:

> . . . tried all possible means to make English compulsory in every sphere. You couldn't send a petition in your language to the government--it had to be in English. They thought that would be a very strong weapon to control the people. If you have one, unifying, the colonial master's language, you can have some sort of obedience to the language and the master.

The English language was a necessity, then, for anyone wishing to enter the political domain or, indeed, for anyone desiring access to higher knowledge. In Anya's country, there were separate school systems, one in the national language that led to secondary school only, "where the highest profession available was to be a schoolteacher, and the other, where English was the medium, that led to government jobs and the university. People with high aspirations went to those schools." Although all schooling was public and free, to enter the English school required stiff competition.

In Phyl's country, English was the only language used throughout the formal education system at the time. It was

> . . . the high prestige language. Everything was in English--the movies were in English, most of the books. You had to learn the language. The dialect would be for the common people. We call them "wooden shoe". In school, if you spoke the dialect, people would laugh at you.

In both cases, then, there was a built in class distinction between those who spoke the English language and those who

didn't, as well as the practical imperative to learn the language if one wanted to "get anywhere" or "be somebody" in the society.

In all but these respects, though, there are great differences between the two Asian countries, as well as in the personal experience and background of Anya and Phyl. The history of colonization in the two countries, as well as temperamental national characteristics, as described by them, affected the way that the dominant culture was perceived in each. In Anya's country, in spite of political and economic domination, the foreigners were never able to shake certain well-established cultural traditions, national pride and resentment of the foreign intrusion and, importantly, the national religion. And so,

> Even when we learned in English, there were subjects in the curriculum--literature, Bhuddhism--which, though taught in English, kept pride in your nation and your culture. There were subjects like history and geography with bias towards Western views, but throughout the country and throughout those years there was the national spirit. People always realized that they had this bias towards Western thought and always wanted to do away with it.

Anya compares her national culture with that of India, to point up how resistent hers had been to cultural imperialism. By contrast, Phyl describes her culture as having been subdued by the colonial experience in major ways. She says, "I visited Thailand--sometimes I would almost cry. Because Thailand is lucky in this: it was not invaded. It wasn't occupied by foreigners coming in to tell you what to

do, removing your very sense of identity and pride." Christianity played a strategic role in domination, the missionaries having come in the first wave two centuries before. Whatever their individual purposes, they were in de facto collusion with the colonial power and had succeeded in converting virtually the entire nation--however much the people adapted Christianity to their particular blend of ancient religious practice and thought. Phyl says of her culture generally, "We are the least Asian among the Asians."

Though it is difficult to draw direct lines between the broad influences of national feeling/ideology and individual consciousness, nevertheless what stands out in the two accounts overall is Anya's clear resistance to her schooling, as it represented the vestige of the colonial power as well as of the new elite, and Phyl's memory of loving every minute of it. Since today both of them share strong political views that are strictly anti-colonial and anti-elite, I cannot dismiss what they have to say about their cultures as merely subjective extensions of their personal experiences with school, or vice versa.

There are, of course, factors of personal and family background that helped to influence the feelings they brought with them to school. In many ways, these are similar. Both of them were in special positions in the family. Anya was the only daughter, and her parents wanted the best that could be had in the way of education for her. Phyl was the

youngest daughter in a large family, for whom, she explains, special attention would be given: "As the youngest, I was given the best." For both, the father was the one most concerned with pursuing education for the daughter. Anya's, a government worker who had followed early education with night school work, "was always interested when I came home from school, he used to look at all my books and be happy. . . . " However, her mother, with a lower level of education, "didn't know how to help me, didn't know what I was studying or how to guide me." Phyl's father had had a high school education, and, influenced by a friend who had studied in the United States, had started his own school and was very active in the community. Her mother, on the other hand, while having had some formal education, "represented the religious side of the family", primarily. Both women speak of the influence of their siblings. Anya's older brothers, along with her uncles, were active politically and it is from there, she reports, that she got her "anti-capitalist and patriotic views" which made adjustment to the English school problematical. Phyl's older siblings were educated, and the oldest sisters were her first teachers before she went to school. One gets the sense from her that she very early on developed a high regard for education itself, and in judging by the kinds of things she was reading or having read to her, her

education was fully in the Western and Christian frame of reference.

Looking back for a moment at the original categories of integrative and instrumental motivation, one sees that while there are clearly pragmatic reasons for Phyl and Anya's pursuit of education, there is also considerable ambiguity. While education and the English language for Anya's politically-oriented family members were necessary for professional advancement, they also represented a hated culture and despised elite class. The integrative motive seems very absent. Phyl reflects that her present populist views probably came from her father, who was an early nationalist and community organizer, and anti-clerical as well. And yet, it was a strain of Western ideology that most influenced him in these ideals. But it is unlikely, judging from her account, that at the time of her early schooling she was faced with the kind of conflict that Anya describes. More like Ruth, whose childhood was imbued with an unquestioned acceptance of the Western culture, education for Phyl at the time was something to be pursued for itself, for the love of learning.

United States: Marvina and Rebeca. It is difficult to bring together the experiences of the Africans, the Asians, and the Americans I interviewed for a discussion of perceptions of promise for "outsiders". In colonial and

post-colonial countries, issues of class, power, and prestige were (and still are) completely upfront: no one claimed these did not exist; everyone knew exactly where they lay. To a large extent, for people like my friends from those countries, there was always the choice: stay where you are or for a variety of reasons, take exceptional measures to change, to move into the minority class where the rewards are immediate and considerable, if not necessarily all that was promised. You could also "go home again" in some ways, since the rest of the world was going along its own way, speaking your own first language. The problems for people in that situation are quite different from those for the "outsiders" in the United States, minorities in a majority society.

This society has always rejected the idea of political, social and economic hierarchies--however much these, in fact, have always existed. The powerful myth of equal opportunity blurs realities, so that the very words "dominance", "outsider" and "prestige" are next to taboo.* The U.S. has long practised discrimination against racial minorities and the poor within its very institutions--not, as would like to be believed, only in the distant and

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*Even recently, when social injustice has been loudly exposed and acknowledged,in the safe arena of academic discussion, a scholar like Einar Haugen must still remind his colleagues: "We need to think in terms of dominant and nondominant, but these are terms we don't like to talk about because they are ultimately political."[6]

shameful past, or only as the local aberration of certain fanatic groups. While so doing, it has held out an ideology that there are no fundamental differences between "Americans" of whatever race or cultural group--immigrant, indigenous, or "long-established". Further, through education,which is compulsory and free today, anyone can "make it", depending, of course, on the effort one is willing to make. The onus of failure falls directly on the shoulders of the individual, and the obvious success of others is held up as proof that the myth is real. The melting pot idea and the "American dream" persist in spite of facts which, if current political trends are a good indication, the society would prefer to deny than face.

In many ways, the lives of both Marvina and Rebeca might be considered proof of the reality of the myth. Two women from extreme poverty backgrounds, one black American, the other Hispanic, today are about to receive doctorates. They already have professional status and will have high salaries, houses of their own, and other attributes of the "American Dream". To suggest, however, that it was the smooth working of an egalitarian society that brought them to where they are now would be false and belittling of their struggle.

What is interesting in regard to perceptions is how important the myth in fact was in shaping their lives, in contrast to an awareness of realities. Though classified

together as minorities in this country, their experiences are very different.

Marvina grew up in a small city in the South, in the poorest section of the segregated neighborhood. Streets leading from where she lived into the white district changed their names at a cross-section. The two schools in her part of town were also segregated between the more affluent (and lighter-skinned) blacks and the lesser. Her family lived on an income of $1500 a year, which her mother reminded them all was privilege. There were also different black church communities. In this context, what becomes quickly clear is that the myth of "upward mobility" and the power of individual effort, as put against realities of racial discrimination, were quickly translated into class struggle. There were the "uppity middle-class Negroes who were like white folks" and there were persons like themselves, for whom education held out promise of survival, first, and then, the better life. Marvina's mother, whose work was as a maid in white households, "had middle-class values" and wanted education for her children at all costs--"the sky's the limit"--so that they could "be somebody".

A strong influence in the community was the Church, which gave sustenance to the myth in its own way, as Marvina describes, both in asserting that all persons, black and white alike, were brothers, sisters and cousins under God, and that one should listen to the Word: "Seek and Ye shall

find; Knock and the Door will be open", and "Dare to be Different". Persons like her mother were "not at all political", but her father, a blue collar worker and also an ardent member of the Church, brought a different sense to "Dare to be Different", in his civil rights activities and involvement with the N.A.A.C.P. Education meant "be somebody" to him in the context of racial realities. He would tell Marvina:

> . . . people can take things away from you, but once you get it in your head, there's no way. The white power structure can take away your name, they can take away your clothes, they can take away your job, but once you get something in your head, they can't take it away.

The importance of mastering standard English was paramount, and what it represented, complex. It meant being a "learned person", sounding "Northern" rather than "Southern", "City", rather than "Country". The urgency with which Marvina describes efforts learning to "speak proper" is testimony to the force of linguistic discrimination in this society. Where it meant for her personally being judged as "uppity" and ostracized both by neighbors left behind as she became educated and, much later, by militant blacks, who felt left out of the mainstream in a college setting, all shows how such discrimination runs deep.

Rebeca speaks today at some length about the importance of the United States for all Puerto Ricans. As she put it, "We are ruled by you." Everything is

American, geared to the American dollar and job--even though the dollar goes directly back to the United States. It is clear to her now, though she seems sometimes reluctant to speak out about it, that for upper-class Puerto Ricans, education comes easily, providing them with opportunities that she had, instead, to struggle for. Learning the English language, in her perception, is an unfortunate necessity: she speaks of "being forced to learn English", of her resentment that in the Puerto Rican schools, English was a required subject ("whereas here, do they require Spanish in the schools?"), and that "there's no way that you can get away without taking English." Today she acknowledges that because she knows the language "to get by with", it is easier for her to stay in this country than for other Puerto Ricans without it.

Rebeca's experience is different from those of the others. Her achievement in learning English and in finding place in this society in large measure must be explained by qualities in her personality that countered social realities from the beginning. She grew up in a rural hill town in Puerto Rico, one of the younger children in a very large family. Her father was a farm worker, her mother a housewife and field worker until Rebeca was eight, when she got a job as a laundress in a hospital. Neither of her parents had been able to afford to go to school beyond third grade, and her mother in particular felt strongly that her

children should: "It was not 'you go to school if you want'; we had to go to school!" Rebeca went at a very early age, as children would--tagging along with the older ones because there was no one to take care of them at home. Contact with the outside world for her, up to the time that she left the country, was "a stretch of road between the town and the airport".

Education for her parents, certainly meant a means for economic survival but, she points out, it was only in the late sixties that they understood its importance, perhaps at the same time that her mother began her new job and, "working her way around the things she had to do", taught herself enough practical medical skills to help in the community after hours.

Rebeca says she takes after her mother in "working her way around", and describes herself as "the black sheep in the family, that is, the strongest one". Throughout the course of her life "I always have had the courage to achieve what I wanted to--ever since I've known myself." Thus, though there was little from the outside to provide her with motivation for her education, she pursued her own wants. She was a rebellious schoolchild, always getting into trouble; but at the same time she loved to read and write, and often found teachers she cared to work for. But her hatred of rigidities both in the school and at home seems to have contributed to her decision to leave at the age of fifteen:

"I had all these things in my mind . . . I was never going to go back home." Instead, she followed the dream:

> I think it's true for everyone who's not from the United States. We have the dream of coming here. New York is a big thing for us. So I made my way, I found my way through. I wrote to my aunt and made arrangements.

She went to school in New York for a semester, until she married and left to work in a factory, where "my learning English really began to develop." Seven years later, after a fight with her husband,

> I didn't know what to do, I took off, I left the house and I "went downtown" as we say in Puerto Rico. I saw an advertisement in one of the windows of the outreach center for the community college; I went in and signed up for courses. It never crossed my mind that I was going back to school.

In asking Rebeca about her motivation, she insists that, while she has always known herself and what she wanted, there are no specific reasons: "I believe in destiny. It's not that I went back to school because I was here in the United States. That's not the point. I was here, it was time, and I did. It wasn't because I was in the United States and I was supposed to do it. I had to do it."

Her response suggests in part, perhaps, the disappointment with the original dream, the promise of what coming to the United States would mean and the realities that she found here; it reflects, too, the paradox that runs through her story, that while she repeatedly asserts how self-motivated she has always been, she attributes the

events of her life to destiny.

Summary

The literature suggests that acquisition of the prestige language depends largely on attitudes towards the dominant culture and perception of the promises held out by education. The child's motivation to learn will be influenced by such attitudes and perceptions conveyed by family and immediate community. The interviews reflect a wide spectrum in attitude towards the dominant culture: from the sense of mystique it carried for colonialized Africans, to the ambivalence felt among those in post-colonial Asia, where nationalism countered long-standing prestige factors, as well as among minorities in this country, where realities of social and racial discrimination contradicted the "American Dream". Among the complex of motives for pursuing education and learning English was, for all, the economic one: the practical necessity of education for survival, for betterment, and, sometimes, for "getting rich like the white man". Education also promised status, a means to "be somebody". There were also survival motives in the political sense: in various ways, education was seen as a means not to join the dominant culture, but to stand up to it, be equal to it while retaining separate identity. Another motive was religious: education was seen as equivalent to salvation. And education was for some, of

value in itself: as the route to becoming literate, to "being learned", to having access to knowledge for its own sake.

That these motives were never entirely separate, and sometimes, within a given family, conflicting, suggests that the categories brought up in the literature--integrative and instrumental--are only broadly useful. Furthermore, specific family relationships--the urgency with which a parent, for example, will encourage the child or, conversely, give little support at all--are influential. And individual personality characteristics are of course primary factors in determining the course of things.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Wallace E. Lambert, "A Social Psychology of Bilinguilism," in Language, Psychology and Culture, ed. Anwar S. Dil (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 211-233.

[2]Joshua A. Fishman, "The Acquisition and Retention of Bi-Literacy: A Precis," paper delivered at the First Shaughnessy Memorial Conference, City College of New York, April 3, 1980. In a similar vein, Orlando Patterson at the same conference compared the socio-cultural contexts historically of black Jamaicans and black Americans, in his paper entitled, "Language, Ethnicity and Change".

[3]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963); Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[4]Samuel Bowles, "Getting Nowhere: Programmed Class Stagnation," Society, June 1972, pp. 42-49.

[5]Einar Haugen, "The Curse of Babel," in Language as a Human Problem, eds. Einar Haugen and Morton Bloomfield (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), p. 42. Also see Frederick Williams, "Language, Attitude, and Social Change," Language and Poverty, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 380-399, for his discussion of stereotyping by speech characteristics.

[6]Haugen, Twenty-first Annual Round Table: Bi-Lingualism and Language Content, p. 310 quoted in Courtney B. Cazden, "Problems for Education: Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment," in Language as a Human Problem, p. 141.

C H A P T E R I I I

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Introduction

The current emphasis on acquisition of basic language skills, like earlier traditional approaches, focuses primarily on aspects of structure. However, such aspects may be the least problematic when it comes to second language learning. True, some persons have more talent for languages than others, and it is known that children will pick up the new, at least in some respects, far more easily than will adults. Also, contrastive features of the new and the original language will certainly affect the ease of difficulty of acquisition: for example, phonetic similarities between the two may raise obstacles to learning, while syntactical similarities, on the other hand, will more likely ease the process. And where reading and writing are concerned, it matters whether the new language has the same graphic system, of course, or whether it is written in a phonetic alphabet or otherwise. But all such problems in second language learning can be overcome and from a strictly linguistic viewpoint, there seems little reason why they cannot.

On the other hand, second language learning is

complicated by many factors other than linguistic ones. Pedagogy aids or abets the process: traditional approaches to language teaching, often accompanied by mechanistic learning modes, may be quite effective for learning some aspects of a new language; alternative approaches that stress more creative involvement on the part of the learner may more effectively develop other aspects. Such approaches, reflecting as they do assumptions about learning and ultimate objectives, will significantly affect what is learned as well as how successfully this is achieved.

The amount of exposure to the new language matters significantly, although quantity alone is not critical. The seeming drawbacks of limited or delayed exposure, for example, may be offset by other factors such as a positive motivation to learn or responsive teaching methods. Similarly, total immersion in the new language, on the face of it perhaps pedagogically ideal, may instead have negative results when punishment for speaking one's original language is involved.

Relevant to the question of exposure is the compatibility between school and out of school language contexts. For example, a child immersed in the language in a boarding school may acquire it more quickly than in a day school situation where each night, at home, there is no practice or support for her learning the new language.

Conversely, where at home there is active encouragement of the child's efforts, there may be added incentive to do well in school.

Languages carry meanings, and the content of language being learned will pose problems for the learner if this has little relation to his own experience. It is one thing to learn a foreign word for a familiar concept; to learn both the new word and the foreign concept is to take on a double task. Further, exclusion of one's familiar reference may have negative psychological, as well as cognitive, effects that influence motivation. This is particularly true where there is implicit, if not explicit, derogation of one's language and culture.

For underlying all such factors affecting language acquisition are the social attitudes towards different languages per se. Where one language is designated as "standard" and others by implication as "substandard" or "deficit" (rather than "different"), or where one language carries the prestige of the educated and the powerful while others do not, such meanings can fundamentally influence learning in complicated ways. "Prestige" itself is no simple issue. In this country, for example, while standard American English is the rule, literary French or Spanish are considered equally respectable, but French spoken by the Haitian immigrant or Spanish by the Chicano are not. My African friends quoted here point out that it is not enough

to speak English, in Africa; one must speak English "absolutely correctly", "just like a European". Language discrimination is tied to social classifications, and attitudes may be determinative in aiding or abetting learning.

The interviews explored the question of language acquisition throughout, in various ways. Structural differences between the new and the original language were of least concern to the people I interviewed--or were in any case less memorable than other factors. Rather, such questions as degrees of exposure, school/home conflicts, emphases on "correctness" over meaningful communication, and attitudes towards the language seem to be issues of most concern.

This chapter addresses first of all the common base between them: that all of them were taught the new language through traditional approaches, although they responded differently. The effects of limited, delayed and total exposure to the language through schooling are then explored, with extended discussion given to the experience of Anya. The particular problems involved where emphasis on proper modes, in Africa with "The King's English", in the United States with "Standard English", are described. By contrast, Rebeca's experience in learning "Survival English" is set out, providing as it does a foil to the in school experience.

Traditional Methods: A Common Base

Let me begin with a broad generalization--that all of them, from primary school up, experienced what Paolo Freire describes as characteristic of "banking education".[1] The school environment was characterized by strict discipline to promote obedience, giving much power to the teacher to dispense with preordained knowledge that the children were to absorb, feed back.

> First grade, no slate, no pen. We used to write on the ground--the teacher would have the blackboard outside, then write 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and say, "This is one, this is two, three-3, four-4, this is A, this is B, this is C," and so on. And then looking at the blackboard, in the open, in the field, and you have a little spot for yourself and you make it in the sand and you write it all in the sand--1,2,3,4. If there's wind, you'd be sorry. Teacher would come from teaching the upper grades to check your work, and you'd say there'd just been a little wind, a cyclone, and everything is gone, and he'd say, "No way!" and start beating you. (Nzamba)

"They just poured subject matter into the students; they just catered the students to the examinations--they were so competitive," says Anya. There was little opportunity for discussion; questions and answers were in some cases both provided, memorized, and given back. "They would teach, then ask you questions to find out if you had learned anything. If you answered correctly, they knew you had learned. If you didn't answer, you were dumb." (Ruth) Teachers were disciplinarians and children were expected to behave: "being quiet was a very important thing, keeping order in

the classroom". (Marvina)

Learning the language, they all point out, involved the familiar traditional grammar work, the emphasis on correct forms and memorization of punctuation rules, and new vocabulary. "Probably as early as third grade, I can remember drilling and having to go home and do all those exercises and writing the correct verb in the sentence, being able to pick that out, learning subject-verb agreement, diagramming, and drilling on 'he does, she does, we do, she and it does'." (Marvina)

These commonalities are of less interest, however, than the particular contexts that emerge in the course of the interviews--how such traditional methods and schooling environments were played out in light of what the children brought with them to the school and how they responded, specifically, for this chapter, in their learning of the language. Their responses to the experience are varied: for Anya "it was an agony!", for Ruth "it was difficult, very, very difficult", for Phyl something of a matter of course, and for Nzamba, "the most dramatic experience of my life" that, like Marvina, he loves to recreate. Rebeca did her best to skip all English classes until she dropped out of school. She pursued her learning of the language much later in the "school of life" as a factory worker in this country before joining a nontraditional college program. Clearly, there are a variety of reasons that explain the

difference in their responses to the experience. There may be no necessary correlation between their feelings at the time and how well they learned the language, but what they have to say about the way they can and do make use of the language today suggests that how they learned it in those early years had lasting effect.

Limited or Delayed Exposure

Obviously, the sheer extent of exposure matters, though as will be seen, quantity is of least concern. In her early schooling, Rebeca had the least exposure but perhaps even here, she might have responded differently to the learning of the language if she had been taught differently. Nzamba was given formal English instruction only long after he had been exposed and won over to the British-oriented school system. Phyl, Anya, Ruth and Marvina all were "immersed" in the language--but at different times in their schooling, with different imperatives from school as well as home. Of course the difference between the boarding school situation and one where there is daily contact with home matters. A look at Rebeca's experience when as a young woman she learned English totally outside of school (a different kind of immersion) raises questions about whether the amount of exposure itself is half as important as its nature in the first place.

Until she left Puerto Rico for New York, at age fifteen, Rebeca went to a small school in a rural hill town where English was taught as a subject ("the way you have to study a foreign language here"), forty-five minutes a day from kindergarten up. It was an exposure that held little meaning for her:

> It was only a forty-five minutes class period every day--and you don't use that English outside the classroom. There were six classes in Spanish against one in English. You're not practising the language--it's not conversational English, either. You're just learning the grammar, the punctuation, writing, all at the same time, all in forty-five minutes. It's not much time to learn.
> By the time I came here, I don't think I could sit down and read a book in English--probably words, maybe a sentence. It was just another class. If I had to read a textbook in English, it was the same way that I had to do a math problem, multiplication. I was finished and that's that. It didn't have any relation to any of my life. It was just one other thing I had to learn in school. I never thought about having to learn English.

Not much time to learn, clearly. Though one wonders whether even given that minimal amount of class time, things might have been different so that the language had "more relation to my life", given her more incentive to practice and learn. Her comments bring up issues raised by the others whose exposure to English was significantly greater: Is the language made relevant to one's own life? Is it English you could speak outside of the classroom? Is a language--spoken or written--something you can learn by doing the homework and that's that? What is lacking in the school environment--or the English classroom--that makes a

bright child see it as "just one other thing I had to learn"?

The reason Rebeca gives for "hating English" is part of the problem:

> I hated English because it's not my native language; it's hard. Pronunciation is different; one word will have many meanings, but sometimes you don't even know which one to use. Spanish is more direct, and you can write it exactly as it's pronounced.

How different is Nzamba's account--which also concerns pronunciation:

> English was a shock. The first time we had to take the first lesson in English, it was about the desks, about the classroom, about ourselves, our bodies. The African teacher said 'English' and wrote it on the board. I had thought 'English' was spelled 'INGILICHI', yet it was spelled E-N-G-L-I-S-H-! My Gosh! You know, my language--you write it the way you speak it. And here comes the English teacher saying, "This is a table", pointing at it, and saying what it was, writing it on the board. Wow! "This is a chair", "This is a boy" and "Theeeeezzze are boyzzz"--it was the most dramatic experience of my life trying to learn something that was so different. Amazing--and in one year, we could speak and read and write English.

Perhaps a reason for the difference in their remembered response to the strictly phonetic problems in learning English has partly to do with the relative fluency in the language they feel they possess today. But certainly it has to do with the difference in exposure and the way it occurred. Nzamba began English instruction--two hours each day--well along in his schooling. In his time, the first language of instruction in the schools for African children was in the local vernacular; in middle school the

interethnic language was used--as it was through high school, although written examinations from then on were all in English. He had been acclimatized to the British-oriented school environment; he was saturated with the values of "being like a European" and pleased with the privilege of being in school. The young would-be Europeans "worshipped" their African teachers: "Anyone who could speak a little English, say 'Good Morning, Class', my goodness! it was like he's a European automatically! We did not admire them, we worshipped them." He points out, too, that although he began to learn English relatively late, English was spoken around him in school, and, importantly his learning had been up to then in the British context. Texts read in the interethnic language had been translated by missionaries from English into that language. Even as early as basic arithmetic, the context had been Anglicized:

> You know, two birch trees plus two oak trees make four trees; twenty-one shillings make one guinea--whereas we had our own currencies in East Africa. These guys would not translate our experiences into the simple mathematics as we were growing up.

And in writing the A.B.C.'s, learning to write, copying down what the teacher told them, "we reproduced what we were told was the way things were."

The question of context is important regarding its cultural implications, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, what is clear is that Nzamba and his friends--unlike Rebeca--showed such enthusiasm and willingness to

learn the language as an outcome of their general preparedness and overall identification with Europeans. Their high level of motivation made obstacles such as the phonetic differences between the new language and theirs less a problem than a "dramatic" challenge--and if we can believe Nzamba, they learned the language speedily. As Dell Hymes comments, "If children identified with speakers of the standard variety, expected and wished to be like them, to be of them, they could readily enough acquire the variety. . . ."[2] Thus, exposure to the language per se seems less important than the factors that influence willingness to learn.

Exposure Through "Total Immersion"

There is a common-sense pedagogical rationale in favor of "immersion": surely the best way to learn the language is to jump right into it, surround yourself with it, live it, dream in it. The professional arguments in favor of this and against mother-tongue education often come back to this common logic--sometimes heard by people who themselves or whose relatives in fact did learn the language "easily" this way and therefore seem to have little sympathy for the arguments of those who didn't. The pragmatic arguments are somewhat convincing where pragmatism is at issue: if you are as fully exposed to English as possible, you will learn it faster; using the mother-tongue language simply delays learning the language you can use to get

where you want.*

From the point of view of educational policy makers, there may be a variety of political considerations for or against requiring immersion in the dominant language for speakers of other languages. As has been mentioned in Chapter Two (p. 33), there are a variety of interpretations of such policy by the "outsiders". Whether for the promotion of cultural/political unity or for the repression of potentially divisive elements, or, as in the case of colonial societies where education for indigenous populations is reserved for the very few, for the training of "semi-literate functionaries"--in any case, the choice is a carefully considered one.

Although at different stages in their schooling, Phyl, Anya and Ruth all learned English under a system of total immersion. Not only the language of instruction, but of all communication within the school, English was the rule, and speaking one's own language punishable in a variety of ways:

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*Arguments for and against mother tongue literacy have various dimensions. Clearly there are great differences between children and adult learners; major developmental cognitive processes occur at an early age. But if we agree that critical thinking can and should be developed at any age then the argument for literacy learning in the mother tongue seems inevitable--even where it might seem more practicable for the adults to learn the language where it will be put to use immediately.

> The language of instruction was English, and the only time you could speak the dialect would be during the time set aside when we studied it. Otherwise, if you spoke the dialect, people would laugh at you--especially in a class like arithmetic, history or social studies. . . all these would be in English.
>
> (Phyl: primary school, day, age 7)

> You'd get a mark if they found you speaking the vernacular . . . there were prefects, other students spying on you. If you were caught, they would make you work for an hour on Saturday afternoon.
>
> (Ruth: boarding school, age 10)

> If you talked in the dialect, they fined you five cents a word. We didn't have the money to pay, so we just kept quiet. It was a real agony!
>
> (Anya: secondary, day, age 10)

Their responses; "Your tendency is first to keep quiet and check your grammar, you know!" (Phyl) "Because you are fined, you just kept dumb rather than trying to answer." (Anya) "You were afraid you might break the language . . . it was embarrassing if you did." (Ruth)

Their experiences raise questions that suggest that whatever the pedagogical or political rationale for total immersion, in fact such policy is problematical. What is denied the child when his/her language is denied as a means of learning per se? What happens if the child learns such basic cognitive skills as reading and writing in a language other than his/her own? Where immersion is combined with an emphasis on correctness/error, what is the effect on learning the language? What of the common practice of punishment for using one's own? What happens when a child goes home to people who are only speaking the other, the

first language? What is the language context being taught? Can the child bring his/her own meanings and experience to bear within the new language?

Such questions are raised--and given particular slant--in Anya's case. Our interviews together returned to this central issue that continues to disturb her: that she was forced to speak, hear, write and try to think in English only, once she entered the English school.

Anya came from a lower class family ("I was a common village girl") and attended the local primary school, where all teaching was in the national language, until the age of ten. Because the English schools were known to be far superior--and to lead to higher education and professional opportunities--she competed and successfully gained entry, although because she knew no English, she was put back a year and felt under much pressure to catch up. The school followed the policy of total immersion--one was fined five cents a word for speaking the national language--and Anya found the first years an "agony":

> You can see, coming from the village, going to the English school, starting a totally different language when you have no previous exposure . . . well, I was a victim of that system, and I knew such hard mental agony. It's a foreign language, a totally foreign, second language. Only one percent of the population may be talking English in their homes; in the school you are learning English in a totally artificial environment.

Being fined for speaking one's own language had symbolic as well as practical significance--for underlying her discomfort

and anxiety during those years was her awareness that she was in school with "one percent" of the English-speaking elite, and she felt her difference in many ways. Of the teachers, who represented the "best", she says, "I can remember still the teachers who taught all my classes and how arrogant they were. I am thinking that if I ever see them again, I will thank them and say they were wrong--I am determined to prove they were wrong!" The teachers "did not know how to relate, to cater to our needs. They only catered to the outstanding students--those who because of their social standing always spoke up with confidence."

Her fellow students were mostly from wealthy educated families who spoke English in their homes. She could tell her difference in many subtle ways, from "the way they talked, their way of life . . . children talk, and you are diagnosed by your class." It was difficult to get along socially in the school:

> I felt that if I had a command of the English language, I could have done better in social activities. As I told you, the teachers wanted to see the children talking English all the time--well, the students from higher families were much better off, and they had people to help them. We others just kept silent. That's how it affected social life.

And if she felt isolated in school, this was compounded by the fact that when she went home each day, there was no one to help her with her English and little understanding of her torment: "There was nobody to express my feelings to . . . my being in a new environment, a completely new group of

students from a different social class, the completely new language. At home I couldn't talk about how I felt . . . my mother couldn't understand."[3] Perhaps exacerbating her tension, while affirming her efforts, was the considerable pressure she felt from her father who, though seldom at home, "knew the value of education" and had very high expectations of her. He followed her progress closely, pulling her out of school on the days he came to town, and identifying her achievements as his own. Though this example comes from a later time, it reflects his concern:

> As soon as my father got the news that I was admitted to the university--the results are published in the paper--he told me that he had prayed to God. This is unusual, we don't pray to God like Christians, but he prayed, looked in the paper, and was so happy, he said, "I felt that I have won a very big sweepstakes!" I can still remember his words. I didn't know the value at the time, but he felt that it was a very big thing for him, he had such high aspirations.

Anya is very clear in her analysis of the effects of learning the langauge in an atmosphere that she calls "totally artificial": "They try to put facts into the heads of the students--in a foreign language you don't understand--you only memorize the facts. They destroy the whole creative power of the child. You can't think. . . . It killed your creativity, your energy, everything." In class:

> You might sometimes be able to understand a question, but not being able to express yourself, you couldn't answer. At that age you need rewards, but you were simply not recognized if you didn't answer. Though you

> may have the natural ability to respond to the question, you just can't do it. You were fined five cents if you spoke in your own language.

Not answering at all was the safest--if unrewarded--response, and the question-and-answer method of teaching/learning not conducive to self-expression:

> I remember in the seventh standard: we were given about fifty questions and answers the teachers gave out--about three or four line answers--and we had to memorize them. You couldn't create answers, you couldn't write English. So unless you are exceptionally bright, it decides your fate.

It affected reading: "I remember I had to spend a lot of time, sometimes reading ten to fifteen times over just to be sure that I could understand the same thing . . . " and writing:

> If you have your own ideas, you can't put them into writing. I felt it was an agony. You know, when I was writing for a test or an exam, there was a whole flow of ideas--but I couldn't put them into words. You lack that whole ability. Inevitably you think in your own language and you have to convert it into English. It very much blocked my creativity. There's no creative power.

What comes through in these remarks is a grim situation: a system of enforcement of the language that discouraged willingness to put it to use at all, a method of teaching that depended largely on "question-answer" communication and rote memorization. Even when given the opportunity, if one had "ideas" one did not have the language to develop them in. This would seem to stifle either learning the language (if one learns a language by using it) or

developing the analytic tools that foster learning of whatever, let alone having access to one's creative potential. With Anya, one feels strongly the particular frustration of a bright young girl with many ideas and much motivation to do well, suffering the imprisonment of language itself, in an environment that was in most ways alien to her.

Anya points out that today, where the national language is used in all schools, the difference is remarkable:

> When they are learning in our language, when this is the medium of instruction, students are always challenging the teacher. There is dialogue and creativity in the class. In my day, nobody questioned the teacher because they didn't know how to make a conversation, how to make an idea clear in English.

This remark suggests that the language of instruction imposed is a key problem, creating an obstacle to what otherwise is a naturally dialogical, discursive mode. Silence, obedience, passivity are not, Anya says, characteristic of the national temperament. They are rather qualities purposefully imposed originally by the British under colonialism and carried on post-independence by those of the elite who had adapted British values. The colonial intention was

> . . . to make students very obedient. . . . The British tried all possible means to make English compulsory in every sphere, as a very strong weapon to control the people. It was their language, their method, their subject matter. A totally different environment. So we were just passive subjects.

Passivity and silence were not typical of Anya's own home environment, it seems, this adding to the sense of being stifled she must have felt at school:

> I always liked to talk with my uncles. Though they were not school educated, they were very intelligent, and they used to discuss everything all the time, about the things happening in their work place, and they used to criticize. I liked very much to listen to them; in the evenings I used to listen, and they encouraged me to talk with them; they regarded me as sometimes a part of them . . . they didn't consider me a small child. I don't know, exactly, but that's how I felt it.

Though they may not have understood the conflicts she experienced at school, the people at home shared with her their political views and she says, "I was very patriotic and anti-capitalist even at my small age--thanks to my uncles and brothers." Their influence, she points out, greatly contributed to her feelings about and struggle with learning English:

> This added to the language factor: I must have connected the language with the British rulers so, trying to learn, trying to talk English all the time, trying to think in English ways--maybe I interpreted this as allying yourself to that group. I wanted to be away from it. I didn't respect English, and I didn't aspire to talk in English and be fluent in English. Only later I realized that was very foolish, but at that time, being small, I was not mature enough to realize.

Many issues--pedagogical, political, and psychological--emerge from Anya's story even as presented in skeletal form here. Regarding the question of the immersion method--accompanied by punishment--as a viable way to help students learn the language, it is clear that she feels that instead

"it blocked my creativity" and "we could not think".

It is interesting that while indeed, as she says, being forced to use English stifled her creativity, the chief reason she gives for not learning the language well are emotional: "I didn't respect English, I didn't aspire to talk in English, and be fluent in English." The powerful influence of her own culture and its anti-colonialist feeling counteracted the influence of the school:

> Throughout the country and throughout those years there was that national spirit--the people always realized that they had this bias towards Western thought, and they wanted to do away with it--unlike in India--the newspapers, in speeches--newspapers are different from here, there are so many people speaking, as you read these, you get exposed to these things. As a nation, we, most of the people, were trying to think against the British system.

Anya, it seems, was caught in the middle of strong contradictory influences, and this, I believe, perhaps even more than the frustration of not being able to do well in the language, is why she continues to remember the experience as "an agony". Lacking identification with the elite, and yet equally strongly committed to succeeding in the reputed "best" educational system, she could not help but feel that "in allying yourself to that group" she was guilty of betrayal. In some ways, it might be said that she opted for maintaining identity, thanks surely in part to the positive encouragement she received from uncles and brothers, at the cost of not learning the language well.

When considering Phyl and Ruth's experience in Asia and Africa respectively, the contrasts with Anya are striking. Phyl's comments are least extensive on this subject, possibly because immersion came earliest on for her--her awareness of it at the age of seven perhaps less acute than for older children, and her retrospective view therefore less clear. More significantly, however, both she and Ruth came from family backgrounds where, although the language spoken at home was the vernacular, familiarity and contact with Western modes of thought as well as a considerably higher level of education meant that the school environment (teachers, curriculum, context) was not a radical shock, and prevalent feelings about Western culture, far from being negative, as in Anya's country, was enthusiastic, if in different ways, for different reasons.

Phyl started learning the English language in primary school, at the age of seven;

> The language of instruction was English, and the only time you could speak the dialect would be during the time set aside when we studied it. Otherwise, if you spoke the dialect, people would laugh at you--especially in a class like arithmetic, history or social studies . . . all these would be in English.*

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*The interview situation prevents analysis of the effect on Phyl of learning literacy in the second language--an important issue, there being evidence that before the age of ten children can suffer "cognitive confusion" in this situation. Phyl's discussion of how fully she incorporated Western patterns of logic (discussed in the next chapter) may be a reflection of this early experience, as may be her insistence that she does far better with speaking than with writing in either tongue.

You would be "laughed at" because of the social connotations of dialect speakers, Phyl explains. "The dialect would be for the common people. We call them 'wooden shoe'--only those wearing wooden shoes speak dialect." Although she and her family always spoke dialect at home, she says that she came to share the general feeling about it: "In those days, I looked down. It is only after a lot of conflict that you are able to say, 'I'm proud of my own'." Nevertheless, by the time she entered boarding school, she was still uneasy using English:

> We learned it well enough to speak, but since you don't speak it at home, you can only understand it--so when somebody speaks English fluently, your tendency is first to keep quiet and check your grammar, you know!

The remark suggests both the stigmatization of dialect speakers (don't betray yourself as a "wooden shoe") as well as the emphasis put on correct forms of English: keeping quiet was preferable to the possibility of making a mistake, at least at this primary school level.

When Phyl went on to boarding school, immersion was complete although the school was run by European nuns. English was used in and out of the classroom and enforced by the threat of fines for those who spoke anything but. Phyl comments that had she continued in the day school situation, she would not have learned English as well as she knows it today, that in some ways it gave her a distinct advantage (but in other respects, it is Phyl who also

comments, "we could not even dream in our own language, and yet your dreams should be your own . . . ").

Ruth, on the other hand, is less sanguine about the immersion-with-punishment system, though her comments are never as strong as Anya's ("I was a victim of the system; it was a real agony"). Her first response, when I asked her what she remembered about the school she went to at the age of ten, was to laugh: "Horrible . . . Let me see . . . I can think of all the negative things, let me think of some bright memories!" What comes first and immediately to mind for her is the system of punishment for using the language:

> The thing that I used to dread when I was at home and thinking about going back was, they had a system there where if you broke the rules, then you'd get punished. You'd get a mark if they found you speaking the vernacular. . . . It was very hard, when I first got there, because I had never been in a situation like that, and it was like living under a continuous threat. If you are caught, if you were heard speaking (they had prefects, students spying on you . . .), they would make you work for an hour for each mark that you got. You couldn't even dream in the vernacular! Supposing you were caught, that meant one hour of labor on Saturday when everybody else wasn't doing anything!
> Language was only part of it, but language made it hard because if you had to be constantly speaking the language five days a week, it was a perpetual threat, no matter how well-behaved you were otherwise.

She speaks frequently of the harshness of the teachers (who were both African and American) and especially one: "Oh gosh! She was from somewhere in Wisconsin. She was awful. She would punish you for everything, for anything, for every thing it was possible to punish for. She taught us English."

Ruth acknowledges that "they were teaching us the hard way, really the hard way, but I think there was benefit out of it . . . it makes a lot of sense that if you failed English, up to this day if you fail English, you are doomed. So you had to do well in English, fail other things, that was the system." But when I ask her whether she would want her daughter to have the same, she says, "I don't want to see poor children going through what I went through--not to be put under fear all the time. But I guess it was effective, because it worked with me. Maybe fear does work!"

But there is the question of what in fact is learned when fear is a motivating factor. There is a mechanistic element in the way she describes the usual practice:

> They would teach, then ask you questions to find out if you had learned anything. If you answered correctly, they knew you had learned, then if you didn't answer, then you were . . . you're dumb.

She says, laughing, "Conditions were so bad that I felt I had to do anything, anything they wanted me to in order to survive!" ("Then you became a real conformist?" I joke. "That's right!" she says.) She points out that while it was very difficult to want to say anything for fear of making a mistake, on the other hand much was learned through reading and writing. With writing, she could afford to make an error--it would not, at least, be held up for all the others to see--and papers would be heavily corrected pointing out

what all the errors were for her to learn by.[4] She says concerning her writing today: "I don't want to hand in my paper. I don't have enough confidence in what I have done. I know it's good, but I'm afraid they will pick it up and tear it to pieces!" This comment suggests that where she may have learned correct forms through writing, she did not, however, develop confidence in expressing herself in that way.

"The King's English"

A common concern expressed by those interviewed was not so much learning English per se as learning it the "proper way". This, of course, varied from country to country, with propriety determined by the powers that be. In English-speaking Africa, Mazrui points out, until recently, "an African who was widely read in Swahili literature but could not speak English was likely to be considered further from being an intellectual than a poorly read African who had acquired fluency in spoken English."[5] Ruth and Nzamba add, here that it is not enough to speak English; one must speak it properly, "like a European".

Ruth had had some English in primary school, but "not to speak it . . . we were not forced to talk it. And now I was in a situation where I had to talk it, speak it. It was difficult, it was really difficult. You were afraid

you might break the language and not speak it properly." The problem was not--as it was for Phyl--the pejorative connotations of the first language, but rather the prestige value carried by speaking English correctly:

> We just had to speak it, but it was embarrassing, embarrassing. I think, you see, it is because generally being educated is being able to speak English--those two more or less go along. If you really are educated, people will measure you by your control of the language, so much so that some will not think highly of you, even if you have a degree and you cannot . . . maybe you say even a sentence wrong. I think this kind of attitude that prevailed was what made the situation embarrassing, humiliating. You were afraid that somebody would laugh at you or something.

She feels the insistence on speaking the language was exaggerated:

> It's a shame this insistence on spoken English. I think it's important that people should learn how to write it because of schools and the stress up to this day on English. But I think it is more important for people to learn how to understand, which is the easiest in language learning, how to understand, first of all, then how to write.

And today, she says, "I have problems with speaking, whereas with writing, I can try out words and realize, no, there's a better one. Whereas, when I speak, I'm often caught not knowing what word to use. Maybe I'm just too conscious of my speech. I know I am when I speak English."

Nzamba's experience was in some ways similar, suggesting a different angle on the problem:

> We were only taught formal English--no colloquialisms ever, and we were scolded for ever lapsing into anything that wasn't by the book "correct English". This included accent and pronunciation. It was not just comprehension

> they were teaching; it was not just being able to speak English our way; it was to speak it absolutely correctly.

He remembers his first teacher:

> I had a very good African English teacher. . . . He used to tell us about short "i": "This is Theeeze are" and "We eat beans and peas and sleep peacefully", you know, the long ee's and everything else, the "walk" and the "boat" and the "cot" and the "coat", the "cost" and the "coast" . . . somehow we got used to being conscious of some of the commonest mistakes we made in the English language among African speakers.

Preparation for the eighth grade nationwide examination meant having to reproduce words from dictation seemingly chosen for their difficulty of vocabulary and contrast of pronunciation alone--certainly not for their sense. Telling this story, Nzamba imitates the British accent with much humor:

> This man came and read a passage for ten minutes, then every phrase, then we'd write, then he'd repeat. . . . He would say something like, no, exactly like: "Locusts.s.s.s.s are trewly destructive insects.s.s.s. and change the fruitful land into wildernessssssssss. Locustsss go in great swarmzzzzzz, and the beating of their numerous wings sounds like moving waterfallzzzzzz," Oh, we sat there . . . you know you're going to fail already because the English is so difficult!

The story is illuminating, showing for one thing the extraordinary success of the method--that Nzamba can reproduce the passage so exactly thirty years later! But it shows, too, the irrelevancy of content, even though Nzamba points out that this particular exercise was exceptional, as for once subject matter was somewhat familiar: "Whoever designed the exam was smart because kids did know what locusts were, nationwide". It shows the emphasis on forms, not on meaning

or on communication, which characterized the ways that English was taught.

When I asked Nzamba where he feels most comfortable in using English today, he said,

> Definitely in formal situations . . . when I am in informal situations now with English speaking people--and that includes, by the way, Africans from different ethnic groups who don't know Kiswahili--, I am very uncomfortable. I am afraid of losing the right accent; I find myself forgetting, worrying about the right prepositions. I immediately slip into my real accent, saying "theeesss" instead of "this". I am aware all the time of what is happening, and I can't relax.

Even after nearly twenty years in this country, Nzamba still carries around a little book where he writes down almost daily a new idiomatic expression--memorizes it, tries it out at great risk!

The emphasis on "the King's English" as described by Ruth and Nzamba, thus it would seem resulted in problems they acknowledge are with them today. With Ruth, what emerges is a reluctance to speak in English at all, having early on learned that silence was the safer route than punishment or ridicule. Nzamba's comments point not only to lack of confidence and excessive attention paid to surface details of pronunciation, but discomfort in anything but formal situations. School English was never colloquial; correctness superceded appropriateness; in informal situations where there is the natural tendency to "relax", he cannot. The effect of the emphasis on both "correctness" and

formality on the issues that most concern Anya--creativity, thinking ability--and what kind of thinking can be developed in this frame will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

"Standard American English"

So far, we have been looking at the experiences of persons learning English as the language of the foreigner and the minority elite. Among their peers, they were privileged, exceptional. To enter the schools they did was not usual; there were more common alternatives, and this was a choice made often at considerable sacrifice. Schools do not exist in a vacuum, however, and surrounding them is the rest of the world--a majority of people going about their business, carrying on as they always have, speaking their own languages rather than English. This meant that in spite of the many problems that evolved in the learning of English within the school, with all the prestige it carried, nevertheless one could in other contexts always speak one's own language without fear of ridicule. Ruth points out, for example, that while she might be embarrassed to hear her parents "breaking the English language" in front of English speakers, there was never any judgement carried over to the way they spoke in the vernacular. Nzamba was uncomfortable with English among English speakers, but never speaking his own of the interethnic language--both of which he learned as

a child out of school. If at school one's home language was forbidden--with serious consequences in certain ways, as Anya has particularly forcefully conveyed,--one still had one's own language "intact" as it were outside of that context.

The situation is very different for persons in the United States who speak either a foreign language or a non-standard variety of English. English is not simply the language of the educated and the prestigious, but of the majority speakers and, with only rare exceptions, the language used as a matter of course in the schools. This has been a country historically wary of deviance and ready to judge a person's level of education and social status simply by the way he or she speaks, The "melting pot" ideal continues to hold forth with an implicit disregard if not disrespect for differences, and language is the flag that signifies assimilation or dissent. Painstaking efforts at changing one's speech patterns in order to "make it" or "pass" are common--there are numerous, sometimes poignant accounts by persons who have succeeded and look back (e.g. Richard Rodriguez recounts coming home to announce triumphantly to his stunned family that "a teacher had said I was losing all trace of my accent").[6]

The problem is intensified for people discriminated against racially as well as for poverty and lack of education.

The imperative to change one's language--since one cannot change one's color--is especially strong, certainly if one wants to "get somewhere"; though that change of language in itself guarantees little, without it there is little hope. For black Americans in this country, whose language is so closely related to the standard variety, the challenge is particularly great. The controversy continues over whether Black English is in fact a "language" or a "dialect"--a controversy among linguists which has distinct political and educational implications.[7] What remains generally true is that the variety spoken by black children is acknowledged to be <u>different</u> only in enlightened schools; the prevailing attitude has been that it is <u>deficient</u>, something to be corrected, hopefully to be overcome. This is communicated by teachers, texts, curricula, and often shared by black parents who want for their children what they haven't had and accept the denigratory view towards their own language.

There is, of course, the accompanying paradox that in acquiring the standard variety essential to getting ahead, one is at the same time ostensibly joining the ranks of the enemy, as it were. If Anya experienced this conflict, it was without the particular twist implicit in the racial situation in this country. For her, learning English meant "allying myself to that group", the hated elite; for a black in the U.S. to learn the standard means, symbolically, not

only aspiring to better class status but, because it is the language of whites mandated in the school system and used throughout the media, it suggests alliance with white culture and values. As Marvina says, the language "symbolizes a move from black, from poor black, to the uppity blacks who are very much like white folks." It is a racial as well as class issue.

Marvina's story reflects the problems associated with learning the language against this particular context, though as we shall see, her response is different from Anya's. Against the social context is set her belief in the language as representing her personal development. If for others, it meant becoming "uppity", for her it stood for "the me I was becoming". It is important, in her case (by contrast to Anya's) that the schools were local, public--i.e. not a significant departure socially from home--and that "my whole life centered around church, school, and home--that total black community."

Marvina is extremely interested in the issue of language itself. "Spoken words always fascinated me, and I always wanted to have a great command of language. . . . I made a deliberate, but not so conscious, effort, as contradictory as that might sound. . . . " If for Anya the fact that English as "totally a foreign language" created problems in learning for her, for Marvina, the standard variety being

so similar to her home language required mastering very subtle distinctions, difficult to hear or to produce because of that similarity.[8] In her early fascination with and love for language, she shows a particular concern for its phonetic aspects, giving a heightened importance to accent and intonation, because of their revealing nature. She was always influenced by the value put on the correct pronunciation as a reflection of identity: Southern is pitted against Northern, "country" or "flat" as against "proper" or educated, and implicitly black against white. Her memories here reflect the urgency of her concern:

> When I was a kid I always liked the Northern accent, you know, when the black people would come home, I would imitate it. I'd go to the bathroom and look in the mirror and say, "Oh Yes, of course", and twist my mouth and carry on, and later it came so natural for me, so natural, and I wasn't going to give that up for the world. I can remember doing something as silly as praying every night that I would keep it, because I liked the way it was!
> . . . in high school, I can remember calling this guy "LeROY" because I thought "LEroy" sounded so country [laughs], and I'd say "FAWrest" . . . I always had a tendency to do that. . . . in college, I worked with this guy who was helping me with articulating the sounds. A lot of Southern black people will say "AX" for "ask" or "asked", and Mr. Bailey was constantly correcting me, aggravating me. He'd say something like, "Well, we can tell you're from the South", and I guess I had a problem with that. I didn't want to be detected, didn't want anybody to tell who I was, where I was from. I didn't want to have a drawl, which white people from the South did have, but half the time I wasn't quite sure. I did not want to talk flat, because to me the sign of an educated person was to be articulate, and he, a white scholar, would help me.

The importance of speaking "well", so closely

connected for her with her sense of "who she was" came early on in life, in particular from her parents, who themselves were conscious of their language and eager to change:

> Before my father began to feel threatened by education, he was enamoured, he encouraged it strongly. And he wanted to sound like a somewhat learned man; he said he never wanted to embarrass himself. My mother wanted to sound like a learned woman. . . .

At home, they would learn together--"there was this whole reciprocal thing going on"--, Marvina bringing home from school all she had discovered about the "proper way":

> It was the book. We adhered to the book. Books were right. "Ain't" is not in the dictionary, so the teacher would correct you, and you in turn would correct your parents. "'Ain't' isn't in the dictionary, Momma." And we would crack up . . . "Ain't ain't in the dictionary!"
>
> The teachers were very careful about their language. That was an important part of their teaching, the spoken language, and transferring that, and we looked up to the teachers as quote "the supreme beings in the school system", so if the teacher said it was all right, it was bound to be right, and we'd go home and tell Momma.

She would bring back the homework:

> I can remember drilling and having to go home and do all these exercises and writing the correct verb in the sentence, being able to pick that out, learning subject-verb agreement, diagramming, and drilling ourselves on the "he does, she does, we do, he, she, and it does."

They worked together:

> My parents used to correct me when we spoke. If one used the wrong verb, we'd help each other out . . . it was not done maliciously. I had learned it in school or they had learned you wouldn't say "I does" and we would hear somebody in church say, 'I DOES love you Sister Johnson!" and we would go home and say, "You heard Sister So and So?". And my mother used to do alot of speaking in church; my Dad was a minister. After the service they would ask, "Did I split any verbs? Did I say something wrong?" There was an interest on their part in making

> sure. They encouraged us to listen carefully because we were in school, and we were getting the education that they hadn't gotten. They would also take adult education classes--so we would be reinforcing to each other.

An important aspect of her upbringing was that both at home, at school, and at church, she was constantly being made aware that she was "special". There was much emphasis on performance:

> My name had nine letters. Nobody else in my family had such a long name. That was very special, so when my parents had company, that was the first thing: "Do you know she can spell her name?" And people oohed and aahed, "No! She has a hard name!" Then it was time for my performance. I'd stand in the middle of the company and spell, and then I'd get, "Smart girl! She's going to be--my daughter is--a smart girl! We're proud of her!"

(I asked her how she felt when she did that,) "I felt good. I think I've always been a ham and that was the kind of thing that nurtured my being brave, not being afraid to stand up in front of people." At church meetings, children were "encouraged to get up and say something, and there was always this support. I don't care how infantile the remarks sounded, they'd say 'YES' in unison, 'AMEN, AMEN! Listen to her! She's going to be something someday!'" She learned to imitate them:

> I'd get up and say, "I thank the Lord for being young; I thank the Lord for my mother and father, I thank the Lord for this, that and the other" . . . I internalized those phrases so that they became a real part of me, imitating, emulating what I was constantly hearing from the adult people in my life.

Marvina points out that the kind of recognition and support she got at church made her feel special:

> Very often it was just my sister and me, and I was mature enough to be with the older women who felt good about me. They were constantly telling me how mature I was, and that I knew how to set myself aside from the world; this was reinforcing. As I told you, my whole life revolved around church, school and my home. . . . I was always in some structured situation. I wasn't left to get involved, quote "get hooked up with the wrong crowd" unquote. That way I learned to discern between what it was that I wanted and what I didn't, to become somebody.

It is important that Marvina grew up in this "structured world" peopled by highly supportive adults. Even her memories of school are primarily focused on the various teachers she had, "the supreme beings in the school system". She speaks, for example, of learning to write, which began with her mother at home, and then:

> . . . in third grade I wanted to write like Miss Fambro. I found myself as I went up wanting to imitate each teacher based on my attraction, and I was attracted to all of my teachers through about 7th grade, and it was 8th grade when I went back to writing like my mother. But from third grade up, I was writing like my teachers, getting a little flair here, a little flair there.

She speaks of imitation in another sense related to obedience. At church:

> I could quote from a million scriptures . . . the cultural transmission process came for me so easily; I mean, their passing down the teachings and my accepting them unquestioningly. I know I questioned things because my mother constantly tells me I had a sharp tongue, but I think I was inclined to be more compliant and do what was expected of me because I was often told by her that I was special.

At school:

> My fourth grade teacher used to call me Grandma Grace. She said that I acted like a little old woman. It did not offend me; it made me feel, I guess, that maybe I

> was special. I used to think I was the second Virgin Mary [laughs], I really did! Maybe I was in college before I came to grips with the fact that because I was so special to Momma didn't mean I was that special!

Marvina's sense of "specialness", her emulation of her mother and other supportive adults--as well as her relative lack of involvement with her peers--put great importance for her on living up to their expectations, to do even better. The language was key to all of this--and acquired with great deliberation as well as enthusiasm.

Her experience demonstrates that where there is strong identification with those who speak the language (e.g., in her case, with "Northerners", with the "educated") there is strong likelihood that one will learn to do so. As with Nzamba, learning the language was a very positive experience. It was always reinforced with rewards, reminders that one was special. Believing in its value, learning it and speaking it was in a sense its own pleasurable reward, too. The support that she got from the family and church was very "reinforcing".

At the same time, there are problems. The very emphasis put on the formal aspects of the language resulted, as for Nzamba and Ruth, in a heightened self-consciousness of just those. Throughout her discussion, her concern for structural matters is evident: it is the word itself (the "twenty-five cent word") that she loved, the sounds and pitch that she strived for, and the flair of her script that

mattered most consciously to her.

The standard language, for Marvina, is tied with her sense of her personal identity--as separate from its social connotations for others--and, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five (pp.164-174), there is the suggestion that she experiences discomfort in departing from that standard. The situation for her is different from that of Nzamba or Ruth because in the perception of herself and others, the home language is not different, but inferior.

"Survival English"

The discussion so far has focused on school-learning of English with an emphasis, it is true, on the negative aspects. What has not been stressed is the indispensibility for all those interviewed of that very learning for getting where they are today. Here it might be useful, for contrast, to look at Rebeca's experience and her conclusions about it, since her learning of the language was informal and self-instructional (aside from her early years) until the time she went back to school, where the approach was nontraditional.

When Rebeca arrived in New York at the age of fifteen, she says she could probably read a word or two of English, but basically she knew none. She lived in an area where most people spoke Spanish, but she quickly learned to get around in English: "There were signs you have to read,

and you have to say things like 'I want a token' and 'where're you going'--you're forced to learn. New York is a city of many languages; you have to know English to survive. You learned survival English."

Her recall of learning English in school, which she attended for a semester, is fused with negative feelings she still has in some ways about the language. "All my classes were in English except for one, Spanish."* She points out that there were no bilingual classes, and that in class she preferred not to speak:

> I would not participate. . . . If the teacher would talk to me you know, on a one to one basis, I would have had a response, if probably not that clear. Nowadays I'm not crazy about participating in class, because of the language. The language creates a lot of other anxieties. I have different points of view, and I would rather not say anything than get into arguments, especially in English.

Although, in her words, she was "forced to learn" some English is school, she points out that the teaching approach hardly encouraged much learning:

> When you go to school, the writing that you do, the reading that you do, is minimal. The teachers don't want to take the time. They give you a bunch of papers to write, an assignment. They take five minutes explaining what they want you to do, or they write directions

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*"I got an F in Spanish, can you believe it?" Counting this a racist incident--the Spanish teacher being Anglo--she received the F because she argued with the teacher every day: "No," she would say, "that's not the way you say it!". Rebeca was clearly speaking vernacular Spanish, and the teacher was clearly intolerant of the difference.

> on the blackboard. You'll sit there for forty, forty-five minutes. You have to do it . . . but it's up to you. They sit behind the desk, reading magazines, doing whatever business they have to do, and when it comes time, they collect the papers. That's the way it is. You're not learning. So you find students that graduate from high school and they don't know how to read or write.

It was when she left school and went to work in a book factory in another state that her English "really developed": "I had to learn to speak the language really fast because I was working with people who were English-speaking. There was no chance to say, 'Let's get somebody to translate'! They yell at you, and there's no way you can get translated!" Being a naturally talkative and gregarious person, she learned quickly through informal conversation in the factory.

> It was a situation where you find friends from the beginning, from when you walk through the door and they say, "This is where you're going to be working," they ask you your name, where you're from--it's something that happens automatically, not something you plan for. Lots of talk, and then they say, "You remind me of somebody that was here ten years ago . . ." or "I met somebody from Puerto Rico . . .," and it's just coming back at you and you always follow it. Sometimes they say things that don't interest you, but it interests the other person that is talking to you, so you will listen. You get into a conversation. . . .

She remembers her own method of learning as she went along:

> You'll find, people say things to you and you go around asking what that meant. You sometimes knew what people were telling you by the expression on their face. I knew what they were saying, then I could simulate that, by practising in my mind--that's one of the things I still do a lot. When I want to learn something, I just read it the first time, then I write it, just repeating that in my mind--practising it quietly, just to myself.

> Nobody knows what I'm doing! Sometimes I take a piece of paper and a pencil and then I just pretend I'm writing it--I'm not actually writing, but maybe pretending that I'm writing it. . . .

She notes that the level of conversation was high because of the backgrounds of her co-workers:

> One of the things I found there was that a lot of the older poeple might have been there for twenty, thirty years, and they knew a lot; they were people who had been born and grew up in the same town, they knew everything about it. That's where you had conversations a lot--you heard about what was going on, with politics, with the school system, with everything and anything. There were kids from school doing parttime work; they found books there they were reading in school or if they had in mind going to college, books they knew they were going to be using. You know . . . there was always something to talk about.

As her own English became more fluent,

> Depending on the content and the people that you're talking to, . . . I found myself that I couldn't shut up! At that point I think I knew quite a lot. I did a lot of talking, like how people live in Puerto Rico, sometimes about the book we were making that day--a lot of people said, "I read that book," or "I had to buy that book. . . ." It was a factory job but it wasn't a dirty job; it wasn't for people who didn't have school. A lot of people there had high school or beyond, working at that job. You had to know something in order to be working there, you had to be able to read a page.

Aside from the informal conversations, the job she was doing required that she read English:

> The relationship between you and the person that is running the machine is so close that you have to be able to, you know, read off how many books we are doing, for what company, this and that, whose the publisher. They are things you have to read, because he's there working at the machine and if it breaks down he will yell at you saying, "Check in that book and see, read how many books we have done". Sometimes the order goes for weeks, sometimes months, and you have to keep track of how many books we have done already. Sometimes I used

> to feed the machines and the pages were made in such a way that you had to really look at the numbers. Sometimes they didn't mean anything and you had to read the titles, or the words at the top and the bottom of the page, to make sure you are putting the right pages in the right pocket to feed the machine.
>
> And there were a lot of words you would have to use like "Stop", "OK", "Go Ahead!" "Hold it!"--a lot of words you had to learn really quick.

When there was time, she did a lot of reading:

> When you're working in a spot by yourself when you don't have to talk to anybody, what I did was I found myself doing a lot of reading, books that I had seen before but that I was never interested in. I remember we were working on a Bible, a huge thing, all in different languages in the same book. . . . And, you know, books from college. Sometimes there was nothing to do, and that's how you spent your time. I had a good collection of books. I really enjoyed my job because I did a lot of reading in Spanish and English. And we had a book sale every Wednesday, where you could get a thirty dollar book for fifteen cents. You had to be working in the shop to be able to get them, but I really had a huge collection.

Rebeca continued to work in this place and others for seven years before, quite impulsively, she decided to go back to school. She is careful to point out that the reason for this was not because she was in the United States, but because it was "time". "I believe in destiny," she says repeatedly.

At the community college she began by taking evening courses in Basic Skills to pass the G.E.D. exams. Her formal instruction in English lasted a year including the standard Freshman composition classes, and throughout the college experience all academic work was closely tied to interests of her own, which she actively pursued in a variety of work

situations connected with the community in which she lived. Her strong feelings today about "relevant" education comes in part from this experience in comparison to all her earlier schooling.

Rebeca's conversational English today is easy and spontaneous, and in her house, talking with her children, they all move back and forth between English and Spanish without pause. When she gets angry at them, she assures me, she always uses Spanish--otherwise, she is not sure when or why they all switch from one to the other.

In formal situations, such as in the classroom or at work, she says, "I don't feel as comfortable talking in English as in my own native language." While it may be that this is simply because she came relatively late to any formal English instruction or academic work in other subjects using the language, the problem is complicated and the points she singles out are ones shared by others who learned English in the school situation from a young age up.

Among the problems she points out is the fact that she cannot find "different ways of saying the same thing"--a problem of fluency, familiarity with a wide range of vocabulary and expression that native speakers have and that bilingual speakers will always struggle with. Like Anya, she is conscious of always having to translate--separating out the idea as it is gradually formed in one's mind and then

having to find words in the unfamiliar language with its limited range. Then, she points out, even knowing all the words (including jargon she suggests even native speakers don't know the meaning of), one is still insecure about levels of expression, appropriate uses for given situations. Not explicit, but clearly underlying her consciousness of language in formal speaking situations is her sense of social and cultural status in this country: "I find it difficult because I have the language problem; they're all Anglo, English-speaking people, their vocabulary is larger than mine, and I find I don't know what to do". She feels that her mastery of English betrays her in the eyes of others as one of the Hispanic community: "I guess they know who I am by the way I speak". Thus her consciousness of the social implications of language weigh heavily, as it does for Marvina, particularly in situations involving her professional life.

Summary

The discussion of language acquisition quickly fanned out in many directions neither strictly linguistic nor pedagogical. For example, it was obvious with Anya that while the total language environment prevented understanding and blocked learning, her feelings of frustration and resistance to the language had just as much if not more to do with social considerations; she was unwilling to

adjust to the culture of the school and all that the language so represented. By contrast, Marvina's ready enthusiasm and conscious pursuit of standard English, in light of complex and contradictory social imperatives, is tied, for her, to her sense of herself as an individual--a psychological angle inseparable from linguistic or social factors, but distinct. Rebeca's thoughts about the bilingual experience as it affects communication, while reflecting problems familiar to all those interviewed, are specific to certain qualities of her personality, as a highly energetic and self-directed woman, to the way she learned English, and to her sense of social realities as a Puerto Rican in this country.

The problems that arise in the course of language acquisition are thus complex, only partly connected with motivational aspects or with methods and emphases used in the schooling situation. Language is far more than a linguistic system, and learning it means more than the acquisition of a useful skill. For the process of learning it means exposure to a new culture, influencing values, sense of self, and perspectives on the world, and in particular, as the following chapter explores, challenges cultural identity in fundamental ways.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 57-74.

[2]Dell Hymes, "Introduction", in Functions of Language in the Classroom, eds. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), p. xxxi.

[3]A similar problem is discussed by Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), pp. 238-249. Also see Richard Rodriquez, "The Achievement of Desire," College English 40 (November, 1978): 238-254.

[4]For a discussion of the uses and misuses of error, see Isabella Halsted, "Putting Error in Its Place," Journal of Basic Writing I (Spring, 1975): 72-86.

[5]Ali A. Mazrui, The Political Sociology of the English Language (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975), p. 90.

[6]Rodriquez, p. 240.

[7]See Geneva Smitherman's discussion of the Ann Arbor school dispute, in "What Go Round Come Round: King in Perspective, Harvard Educational Review 51 (February, 1981), pp. 40-56. A transcript of the Ann Arbor case and the Judge's resolution may be attained through the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. For a discussion of Black English, see the collection by J.D. Dillard, ed. Perspectives on Black English (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975).

[8]On this particular issue, see, Thomas Kochman, "Black American Speech Events and a Language Program for the Classroom," in Functions of Language in the Classroom, pp. 211-267.

CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Introduction

As has been pointed out in Chapter One, the promise of cross-cultural integration is great, offering rich possibilities for new perspectives, knowledge, and relationships in addition to the practical benefits that accrue from broadened social and economic viability. Cultural integration itself is relative. It varies with the degree of adaptation to the other culture, the extent of acceptance by the other culture, and the relationship with the original culture. On a practical level, integration in the cross-cultural context may be defined as the ability to function effectively in both worlds; on a subjective level, it may be defined paradoxically as the sense of belonging to both worlds and to neither one. Experience related to integration is complex, since lines cannot be neatly drawn between cultures. Further, one's sense of belonging or alienation is a reflection of many factors that determine how the world accepts one and how one accepts the world. Finally, one's relation to culture is not a finished state, but rather a continuing and changing process.

Nevertheless, in the life experiences explored in

this study, distinctions between cultures within and outside the school are sufficently clear to reveal influences that helped shape the acculturation to the dominant culture and the balance of old and new in one's sense of cultural identity. While many factors are involved, the part played by language itself is significant. Learning a language, and learning in a language, involve more than the mere acquisition of a new linguistic system. Language conveys cultural meaning in a variety of ways. Thus Marvina speaks of the "language world" of standard English, and Anya of her resistance to "trying to think in English ways."

The structures of languages vary. In learning a new language one is acquiring specific ways of organizing experience and new patterns of thought. Literacy itself affects such thought patterns by altering those determined by oral communication. Thus to the extent that learning the new language and literacy bring with it specific Western thought stuctures, there are fundamental departures from the cognitive stance of the original language.

Language, of course, carries with it referential content as well as a value orientation. What is being talked, heard and written about, and how the culture assesses such things are part of the language itself. This includes

the very words being used,* the sphere of reality portrayed, or the entire "body of knowledge" that is amenable to description by the language user. Some languages may be very adaptable for expressing all kinds of experience--e.g., in borrowing or inventing new words where necessary--, but native language users may be less receptive. If language in part determines perception, the monolingual may be more prone to an ethnocentric and restricted viewpoint. In the schools of those interviewed, the referential content of the language used invariably reflected the cultural assumptions of the educators; it emphasized the history, literature, and ideological bias of the Western/Christian world and excluded--either intentionally or unintentionally--the cultural realities of the learners.

The language learning experience is influenced by the attitudes of educators, the methods of teaching used, and styles of interaction within the school, as well as by influences from outside the school context. The effectiveness of the teacher's approach will be influenced by her expectations of the learner and her feelings about the learner's culture. The teacher's attitudes will, in turn, affect the motivation of the learner. The methods used

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*The recent attempt at altering the sexual bias inherent in the English language, for example, recognizes this dimension.

may or may not be effective in helping the learner to acculturate; this will depend in part on the interactive styles used and their congruity with those the learner is accustomed to outside of school. Where there is little contrast in styles it will presumably be less difficult for the learner to adjust to the school and to learn the language. Adjustment, however, is not the same as integration. The ways in which the language is learned and the purposes for learning it help to spell the difference between adjustment and integration.

In the following pages, the experience of Nzamba will be explored at length. This case was chosen in particular because he provides an extensive discussion of these issues. The focus of his concern deals very specifically with the clash of cultures and the clear distinction between cultural adaptation and problems affecting integration. Issues emerging from his story will then be discussed in reference to the experience of others as these underscore, contrast with, or more fully develop them.

Nzamba and Cultural Identity

Nzamba's experience as he tells of it in the following pages is a fairly dramatic story of cultural identity conflict. The issue of bilingualism hardly pertains, as his linguistic facility in several languages is

a given and, as we have already seen, he learned English with enthusiasm in the space of a year. Regarding motivation, Nzamba fits the theory that those most desirous of integrating with the new culture will most easily acquire the language. What is problematical is rather all that comes with the language, particularly in the context of outside realities. There are complicated dynamics involved in his experience. While on one level he "progressed" through a series of "cultural transitions" (from the village to the school, from the school to teaching in the school, from there to the United States, etc,), this was by no means a simple progress at all. And, as will be brought out in the next chapter, it reflects not simply the complex of cultural identity, but of self-identity as this was shaped by and indeed helped to shape, the whole experience.

In some ways, Nzamba's experience is extreme by comparison to that of the others. The school environment was radically different from that outside. He is the only one of those interviewed whose home and community background was virtually nonliterate, thus making the acquisition of literacy itself, through schooling, an extraordinary cultural shift. The fact that his schooling took place against a background of violent revolution for national independence (from the very powers that controlled the school) is an extreme example of social conflict, with

himself caught in the middle, as it were. Extremes such as this help to highlight influential factors that may be less overtly brought out in the other accounts.

Nzamba describes his experience as being typical of bright young children privileged to go to school in East Africa at that time. But certain aspects are of course unique, if reflecting the transitional nature of the times. There was family disruption: his mother, converted to Christianity when he was seven, left the "pagan" household with another man, taking her son with him. That he then went to school was a further violation of customary ways--for as the first and eldest son, he should have followed the traditional route as apprentice to his father, a doctor, to whom he always felt particular loyalty, though he lived with him only later. Such personal factors in his life are important to an understanding of the ways that he experienced cultural transition. Factors such these, influential in the lives of all individuals, are important considerations for teachers in understanding the psychology of their students.

In presenting Nzamba's story, I have tried to recreate the telling of it as much as possible in his own words, reserving my analysis for later pages. It will be seen that Nzamba has an excellent memory and ability to recreate past experience, as well as much historical

knowledge about the setting in which it took place. The discussion is also charged with his interpretations, in particular his convictions concerning the injustices of colonialism and his feelings about its psychological effects on himself and his people, this, of course, giving slant to memory as well as to the tone of his account.

Nzamba's story. On the first day of school:

> The missionary came and said, "All of you stand. What's your name?" I said my name was Nzamba. She said, "Stupid! you'll be John. What's your name?" My name is "Syombua". "You'll be Mary. What's your name, Stupid? . . . you'll be David." And so on and on. And she prayed in the name of the Holy Ghost, these barbaric kids have now been civilized into Christians. And that somehow got to our heads so strongly, so powerfully, that when we went home that afternoon, we despised all non-Christians without civilized names. Wow! My name is John, my name is David, my name is Elizabeth, my name is Mary. We boasted around, you know? And the other kids without John or James we thought a bunch of fools. They were not Christian, they would go to Hell and be burned.

"Part of your schooling, then, was learning to take on a new identity?" I ask. "Not learning, being forced to take on a new identity. There's a difference. What disturbs me a great deal, it disturbs me most, that I loved it. I had no idea why. I felt that my name was stupid, that my African identity was wrong, and primitive."

"Nzamba" is a pseudonym chosen by my friend. It means "rooster", a "brave guy." Until only about fifteen years ago, some time after he came to this country, he proudly carried his Christian name: John Charles Richardson

Nzamba. He referred to his father as a "witchdoctor", to his ethnic group as a "tribe", he wore three piece suits and "drank tea like a European." These marks of assimilation into the Christian/Western world are more than trappings. His story reflects a complicated development of consciousness, and his self-perception today is ambiguous. He says of himself:

> I think I have had the best of the two worlds, much better than my father, for instance. I'm not an Afro-Saxon, I'm not a black European. I've tried to listen, to learn a lot, and when I go outside Africa, I learn about Europeans. For that matter, my orientation and socialization have been very European anyway, so this kind of love/hate relationship between my European orientation and the African and the conflict between them. . . . I feel so strongly about it. I hate it with a passion, so much so, yet a good deal of me is European, and yet I'm an African.

If he has personally come to grips with his own ambivalence, nevertheless, he insists, "There is no such thing as the psychological revolution of one man, and if some of my people are still manifesting this psychological slavery, then I feel a slave too. Oh it disturbs me up to this day how you people get to our heads!"

Nzamba's memories of his schooling, against the background of his own cultural heritage, provide insight into the process of psychological enslavement as he sees it. That, as he says, he was "forced" to take on a new identity suggests that throughout the process he experienced conflict:

> I lived in two worlds: the real one--Nzamba--and the mythical one--John. Yet every time I went back to the

> world of my father, feeling it to be so real, there were always those conflicting forces: "Your real world," said the mythical world, "is primitive." I mimicked and imitated things I didn't understand. They would let me be like a European, yet I was only there as an outcast. The world--African, real--I hated, because of the mythical world. I rejected the image the mythical world gave me to reject.

If, having been a very bright and enthusiastic student, he tells what is certainly a success story, on the psychological level it reflects a kind of alienation and potential crushing of spirit that was countered only by a combination of unusual life events and strong personal acumen. He points out that "maturity does clear things up somewhat. When you are dependent on your school, teachers, parents, the powers that be, you cannot challenge them. Independence from those made it possible to begin to resolve some of the conflict through challenge."

Let us begin first with the realities concerning colonial education at that time, as interpreted by my friend. His perspective today concerning its purposes is caustic and bitter:

> These people came to ruin us, divorce us from our cultures, for one very simple reason: control. Because once you uplift a man from his culture, his roots, then it's like a tree without roots--it's easier to manipulate him. The American missionaries--and by the way, they were by law all white--worked in coalition with the government, implementing the racist and colonial curricula. At no point did they condemn the colonial government at any time in any way whatsoever.

The Christian message was an effective means for control:

> We were taught how to be good Christians, how to be good servants of the government of his Majesty the King, appointed by God, and that it was only natural to obey. We were never taught to question authority, to question religion as it was presented to us by the missionaries. The missionaries emphasized this over and over again; they were the ones who conquered our minds, made us ready to be passive, good niggers, to turn the other cheek. They were the fools who taught us that, who prepared us to be conquered by their brethren, government.

If ostensibly to provide salvation, the real purpose of missionary education was "to produce some semi-literate Africans who would help in the running of the government as clerks, as messengers, whatever was useful--as long as you know where to get some milk, where to get some groceries for the white man, you know. . . ."

Education for Africans carried much prestige in part because of its inaccessibility to all but the few. "It was not universal, it was not compulsory, it was not free."

> You know, the first children to go to school were the children of chiefs and sub-chiefs--all the puppets working for the government.* The government was very smart: they first of all educated the children of their puppets, then the powerful, the rich. Average families did not send their children to school at all . . . even the number I gave you of twenty students in a class--there'd usually only be five or ten. . . .

For Nzamba to go to school, his father had to bribe the

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*He points out that these were not "real chiefs": "In our ethnic group, the traditional chiefs had been wiped out because they were rebellious. They had rebelled against the incoming Europeans, were all killed, and their dynasties demolished. 1847. The Europeans appointed their own chiefs."

chiefs. "My father was not particularly rich by our standards, but he went to pay the chief some money. You see they made it very difficult. Their children and the subchiefs' children went to school free, without bribing anyone. They didn't want the others to get smart. . . ." Schooling became increasingly more expensive as one progressed from primary through middle school, and increasingly competitive. So as to effectively sort out the "educable" few from the rest, the British examination system was a key factor:

> At the fourth grade level, we had a colony-wide examination. We were wiped out, something like 90% of us, and then at the eighth grade level, another colony-wide examination. It worked out so that after the eighth grade, for my studies, it was about one out of every one thousand students could make it beyond eighth grade. And beyond tenth grade, another colony-wide examination. It was one in ten thousand. And the twelfth grade was one in one hundred thousand.

Of course what this would mean personally to a Nzamba who did well was to give extra flair to the sense of privilege and high motivation to his learning, great encouragement to becoming "like a European":

> . . . if you're in high school, you go in uniform with emblems written on your chest, you know, X high school, and during market day, I would iron my pants, my khaki pants and shirt and make sure I had my badge reading X high school, and all the kids would come and look at it and say, "WOW! A great thing. One in ten thousand who could make it!" I was a star. I was so important! A real trailblazer in every way--first to go to high school; first to be Africa Teacher Grade One; first to come to America; first . . . seventh in the colony, in the country, to get a doctorate--and all this out of fifteen million. "Man!" I'd say, "What did I do for God

> to be this kind to me! I who came from obscurity, I didn't come from a chief's family or a multimillionaire."

For people without education, then, the status associated with it was extreme. There was that aspect later most disturbing to Nzamba, the mystique that surrounded everything European. The schoolboy's aspirations were,

> . . . I'm going to be a lawyer like a European; I'm going to be a teacher like a European. I'm going to have a good house and drink tea and wear woolen suits like a European. I will speak English like a European. In other words, it all the time ended with this facsimile, this pretending, just trying to ally ourselves and look like Europeans. Obviously, this was all in our heads. We couldn't be white. There was no way we could just pick up and go to Middlesex. . . .
> . . . The thing that amazes me up to today is how one missionary, singlehandedly, could convince five thousand people in an area of ten thousand square miles that the white man was right, and he wasn't even using a whip! It's incredible, we believed them--that it was o.k. to change our names, it was just hip to be European and not to be us. . . .

To become educated also meant salvation: "it was a Christian thing to do; it was real hip to be Christian, and at the same time to have your child grow up in the Christian tradition . . . which meant education." The two went hand in hand, fundamentally:

> "In the name of the King of Great Britain, there was King, there was God," there was nothing beyond that. "God" was very much synonymous to "King". The church house was the same thing as the school house. On Sundays, you put away the benches and you convert the place into a Church. It was decorated with pictures of God, White God, of course; White Jesus Christ, White King, White Queen, it was frightening. And a very ugly Satan, very black, with claws and three noses and a big eye in the middle of the forehead.

To become Christian, for Nzamba's mother, a recent convert

("a fanatic"), was essential for her son at all costs.

Schooling, above all, brought "the white man's magic, the mysteries of reading the written word on paper or slate." Nzamba says, "I always wanted to go to school; I was fascinated about knowing how to read a letter from the city, knowing how to read." There was an uncle who could read and write: "I just couldn't understand how he was reading and writing, pricking his pen on some white paper . . . he would say those were words." Literacy in a non-literate society was magical indeed:

> I know one guy by the name Mung'ei, long before I went to school, who used to write and read letters, and he was like a chief. There would be a long line of women and men holding letters the city. They would split a piece of stick and put them there, holding the stick like this . . . in the envelope or out of the envelope . . . they wouldn't hold it in their hands; they thought that would make it dirty, and the white man's magic would disappear, so they would hold it very far away from them until the magician who knew how to read the white magic would pluck it from the stick, open it and read it . . . this is incredible! How can this man just make sense out of these lines??!!

It gave a rewarding, if curious, role to schoolboys of seven or eight, who became the local scribes:

> When we finished, say, second grade, third grade, and we could read, then women would be coming to us from all over the place and we became famous: "Son of So and So can read and write!" They were personal love letters . . . women were telling me their most secret views to their husbands and about their kids . . . and I didn't understand half of it!

("For example?")

> One woman asked me to write a letter--you know they all talk in those parables, it's very hard to understand

> by young people--"O.K., I've asked you to come home the last eight months, you have refused to come home." So I write that all down. "I'm used to being the boy in your family. Let me be! Let me be the boy!" I say to myself, What does she mean! "What? I don't understand that," I say. She [very severe] "Write that down, will you?"*

Nzamba'a particular enthusiasm for learning came in part from an unusual family precedent. His uncle's father was "the one who started first really the whole thing. He was working in the city in the early twenties and learned how to read and write. He was the one who propagated the whole idea in our family, and finally we became leaders in terms of the first degree in our region was from our family, the first medical degree, the first Ed.D. (myself)--it all goes back to my step grandfather." Thus, Nzamba's own father, though himself unschooled, "always told me that he wanted to give me the best."

("What was it like, going to school?")

Nzamba loved school. If his memories are interspersed with his judgments of its effects, they are also tender and often touched with pride.

> The school was somewhere in the middle of all the homesteads, about eight miles away from where I lived.

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*Nzamba's many anecdotes of this sort are very suggestive. They reveal the distance for the schoolboy from the meaning of what he is writing--in part because he is young and inexperienced, but also surely because what he is learning in school is very different from the ways of communicating characteristic of oral societies.

> Sixteen miles a day, round trip. It was so far, at first, that my mothersbrought us. We would get up very early in the morning, about four o'clock, and we were afraid of the animals, so they'd escort us until sunrise. Brothers, sisters. The neighboring homesteads would come together along the way, and we'd get to school before 8:00. On our way back in the afternoon, going home we really used to be very tired and would walk a mile, sit down. We were just physically exhausted. We had carried our food and hidden it in the bush by the school to eat afterwards, hoping that rats and other little animals wouldn't eat it, but quite often it would be eaten.

"It was amazing," he says. "We learned out of nothing. No books, illiterate teachers, incredible!"

> First grade, no slate, no pen. We wrote on the ground. The teacher would have the blackboard outside, then write 1,2,3,4,5, and say, "This is One, 1, Two, 2, Three, 3, This is A, this is B, this is C, and so on." And then, looking at the blackboard in the open, in the field, and you have a little spot for yourself, and you make it in the sand, and you write all that, 1,2, 3,4, with a stick. And if there's wind, man, you'd be sorry. Teacher would come from teaching the upper grades, and you'd say there'd just been a little wind, cyclone, everything gone, and he'd say, "No way," and start beating you.

Like a litany, Nzamba traces the progress upwards:

> Second grade, slate and slate/pencil, and we could not sit . . . still there was no room for us, the blackboard was outside. Third grade, pencil, with used newspapers. You'd get a small space somewhere. . . . Fourth grade, regular paper and pencils. Fifth grade they produced ink--ink with a nib, remember those old pens? As a rule something happened to the ink, it just dropped on your paper and you were beaten for it . . . it was difficult. Fountain pens were owned by rich kids. All right, so, sixth grade, we had textbooks, going back to fifteen years before. They had been passed from class to class. Before that we read the notes from the board from what the teacher told us.

The teachers were fifth or sixth grade graduates:

> . . . but they could speak English. They knew quite a

> bit about the British colonies. They taught us that the Africans are ugly, the black man is ugly . . . .

("But they were black.")

> Yes, but inside they were very white. And we did not admire them, we worshipped them. Anybody who knew how to read and write, especially anyone who could speak some Kiswahili or English, a little English, say "Good Morning, Class," my goodness! It was like he was European automatically!

I ask about "method":

> There was no technique there. I was just told and taught, "This is 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,a,b,c,d, and I want you all to know this by tomorrow morning!" That was it. There was none of that psychological. . . that "have the kids identify with the stuff." Because we wanted to, we did our best. Whoever said learning goes on when there are teachers willing to teach and pupils willing to learn, made it. That's the trick about all teaching.

He gives an example--though it occurred much later--of how quickly and eagerly they learned English:

> English was a shock. The first time we had to take the first lesson in English, it was about the desks, about the classroom, about ourselves, our bodies. The African teacher said "English" and wrote it on the board. I had thought English was spelled "INGILICHI", yet it was spelled E-N-G-L-I-S-H-! My Gosh! You know, my language--you write it the way you speak it. And here comes the English teacher saying, "This is a table", pointing at it, and saying what it was, writing it on the board. Wow! "This is a chair", "This is a boy" "Theeeeezzze are boyzzz"--it was the most dramatic experience in my life trying to learn something that was so different. Amazing--and in one year, we could speak and read and write English.

Learning to read and write came well before learning the English language, but the context of British culture and the Christian orientation was there from the start, beginning on the first day of school, with the very important

changing of names. ("'All of you stand. What's your name?' I said my name was Nzamba. 'Stupid! You'll be John.'")

> Religious instruction, which meant of course Christianity, not African religion, was mandatory. Not only did you have to become Christian, but you had to change your name. That was number one. That was the indoctrination, period. Go and change your name, become Christian, and the white missionaries would say, "In the name of the Lord and the Holy Ghost" (whatever that meant), "these little savages have not been civilized." The most insulting assumption was that it was impossible for African "natives" to comprehend European scholastic and scientific sophistication unless they were Christian.

The local language was used in primary school, but already it had been separated from the local experience:

> You know, arithmetic would be Anglicized: "two birch trees plus two oak trees make four trees" [Nzamba here perfectly imitates a British accent, with humor], or "Twenty-one Shillings make One Guinea." Whereas we had our own currencies in East Africa, and our own trees. These guys would not translate our experiences into the simple mathematics as we were growing up. The problem is you are learning one abstraction, arithmetic, and you are supplementing it with another, one for which you have no picture, no image, nothing you see everyday. It is very difficult to comprehend.

And through school, throughout--in part determined by the given examination system--what they learned was consistently the British interpretation. Before they learned English they read British textbooks which had been translated into the ethnic language:

> Everything we read was British. We were told that we had no history; we were told that we had no literature. We were taught strictly a curriculum that was very British, very English. Even when they talked about us in relation with the advent of the white man, there was no such thing as an independent African history, or independent African intelligence for that matter. Everything was in relation to how the white man came to save

> us from all this, as it were. And I'm not exaggerating in any way whatsoever, from A to Z.

It was an education that systematically distorted realities where it did not simply exclude them. Nzamba tells of the kind of things that later as a young teacher of Civics he was required to teach--while the war for independence was in progress:

> The government I taught was the hierarchical relationship from the lowest form of government all the way up to the King: the chief, the subchief, the district commissioner, then the governor, the colonial secretary, then the British governor, then the King. And the emphasis was all the time on the responsibilities of the country and the local government to the King.

The perspective was explicitly racist:

> Slavery was taught this way. The British master would tell us: "You were less fortunate than they. You see Negroes were civilized in America and the West Indies, looking at it purely objectively and historically. They were Africans who should have been removed and sent to America for civilization." So, slavery was a good thing! Besides, we were told, "it was an economic necessity." Can you believe it? Why didn't they send Europeans to go work in the plantations!

Nzamba sees himself, at the age of eighteen, as very naive. I ask him how he came to see things differently, considering the seeming effectiveness of his schooling in persuading him to the colonial point of view. It was partly through the influence of his uncle that he was made aware of realities that his schooling otherwise denied him. Ultimately, it took leaving the country--as his uncle had, and as his uncle pointed out to him, all African nationalist

leaders and freedom fighters had had to do--to come to full realization of the mythology perpetrated by his education.* However, in spite of his own enthusiastic embrace of his schooling, he sees that even as a schoolboy he had a degree of understanding: "I reacted all along, only at different degrees. At certain levels there are different levels of consciousness as well as different levels of reaction."

There could be no true denial of realities--only, perhaps, repression of them, and a sense of confusion.

> You have to understand that we were living in three worlds: the world of our forefathers, the world of the Christian orientation, and the world of learning the white man's magic, read and write. All the time we were torn between these three worlds--pushed. I literally felt when I went home, it was different, when I went to school, it was different, and when we were studying Christianity, it was different.

He would go home from school as a child or later, on vacation from boarding school, and, "I hated it because school was always easier than home. A lot of work, working on the farms, taking care of the cattle. We would go home and work very hard . . . and of course nobody talked about homework or reading books." At school, he "felt funny singing hymns in morning assembly," saying to himself, "this has nothing to do with reading, writing and arithmetic."

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*Nzamba talks at length about the difference between the African experience in the U.S. compared to England or France, for example. "Exposure for black men in America is another dimension."

At home, the severity of Christian principle aroused both a sense of fear and of rebellion:

> I felt Christianity when I heard "John," or "Esther," or "James," or when my stepfather or my mother forced me to pray before I ate, or before I drank water, or before I went on a trip, or before I went to school, before I did anything, I had to pray and I saw God in my mind. It was God from the church, I saw White God, hovering over my head, haunting me, haunting my image wherever I went. But--at no point did I ever feel I was a good Christian, except out of fear that I would go to Hell, that I would be burned, and go through this excruciating pain, indefinitely--that really scared me. But genuinely? And by the way, I don't think my mother is a genuinely good Christian, either. By that I mean, she mouthes Christianity more than she believes--how could you convert a woman's thinking at forty.*

He would protest having to go to church, in addition to having religion taught daily through school: "I don't understand why you are insisting that I go to church at the same time," he would say to his mother. They would have fights: "I had a rebellious attitude", and "I would be beaten up like hell."

> From that time I began to see Christianity as a forced thing onto my mother who in turn forced it onto me. And I had a bad reaction, very negative reaction. This was true of most young people I know who went to Christian missionary schools as well as having some fanatic

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*"How can you convert a woman that drastically? She is much more traditional than I am--she went through the dancing, she went through the ritual, she went through the circumcision, she went through everything and, all of a sudden, she 'doesn't know anything about it'? She says, 'God has helped me forget everything that I went through.' She keeps saying that, and the more she repeats it, the more I realize that God has not succeeded in making her forget!"

> Christian parents. They hated it, absolutely.
>
> As a result, the breakdown of the social and moral controls, traditional controls within the African societies, all the time started in Christian families--the bad guys in the villages, the town, were without exception the young children who were products of Christians who were, as it were, on the fence--not African, not European, but confused. . . .Remember, the whole purpose was to completely reject Africanisms, that was the teaching. They didn't even give you any leeway, any room to be yourself. A good Christian always is anti-African, which means being divided from oneself.*

If his mother and stepfather's fanatacism provoked rebellion and conflict, his own father, in a different way, contributed to his questioning of the "myth". Regarding Christianity,

> My father has never once said to me, "Christianity is wrong". He never tried to drive a wedge between me and Christianity or between me and my mother, which would have been the same, automatically. He would never say, "Look, this is divorcing you from our culture and our traditions and I am furious." No, no way. Even today, he simply says, "The Christians have their way and we have our own way, and I think it only right that they leave us have our own way." His was a positive approach, which is to say, instead of condemning Christianity, he would give the positive aspects of our African cultural background.

Although "he gave me up for a lost guy in terms of the traditional doctor's training", he quietly kept his son in touch with the culture.

> Mainly what I did was I watched him doctoring, and then asked him about what he does, except to know exactly what he does means being apprenticed as he was to my grandfather, as my grandfather was to my great grandfather,

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*Today, Nzamba distinguishes between Christianity as a universal doctrine and the form it took when imposed by missionaries in his time.

> and as my great grandfather was to my great great grandfather . . . . He would show me how doctors worked, or take me to dances. I couldn't dance--because if it had been discovered I had gone to dances, I would have been kicked out of school by the missionaries . . . but I watched.

Generally, Nzamba points out, whatever was being taught in school was counteracted by the realities of life outside.

> The Christians up to today have been a minority in African society, so there were a lot of "pagans"--I hate that term--Africans around from whom we could all the time learn this and this. The Christian churches really haven't made a dent in the African traditional lifestyle, though the minorities they trained in the English way are the ones that are controlling and ruling the continent. The guys left in the bush, who didn't go to school, they are the majority: the Africans, not the Afro-Saxons or the Black Europeans. So, there was always this group, whether you were at my stepfather's place or my father's place, who could give you anything you wanted in terms of the African way of living.

Thus, afternoons, evenings, weekends, out of school,

> I would go to the dance with my friends and I'd see something different from what I'd see in church. Or I'd go to a gathering of people working a garden, digging, singing and dancing. I'd say to myself, "oh, this is interesting, this is different from what the white man tells us, what the teachers tell us at school." Or I would observe a circumcision--we were supposed to be circumsized in hospitals, remember, and the "primitive" (quote, unquote) "natives" would be circumcized in the bush. We could observe, like anybody else. As far as the other Africans, the <u>real</u> Africans, were concerned, they didn't care if we were children of Isabella, children of Jensen . . . we were <u>their</u> children.

It was impossible, too, to ignore the harsh political realities of the time.

> Now, anybody who lived in the so-called "Native Reserves" knew what was going on. All "able-bodied natives", as we used to call it, between the age of sixteen and fifty had to work for a white employer for at least six months

> . . . they would just come and get us by force. No one would not understand. If there were emergencies and the government needed beef, they would come and get our cattle by force. If you refused, you go to jail. It was blatant. . . . I told you about my cousin who was killed, beaten up while working in the cattle plantation; he died by one settler there.

But, he points out, "the problem was, our consciousness was muted because of fear. We knew, people knew. The difference was, if you know, what do you do? and if you do, what happens to you? Everyone knew."

Although in the school there was no discussion of what was going on outside ("there was a complete 'white-out' on the news"), there were nevertheless a few subversive voices among some of the teachers, British and African alike. Nzamba remembers one African teacher who taught the boys to sing the British anthem thus: "God Save Their Gracious King, Long Live Their Noble Queen" [He sings.]. And then:

> The principal one morning came to us and said, "Monkeys! Monkeys! No one is permitted to ever play with the British Crown, and that includes the United States of America! . . . " and he said, "I want you to pronounce that clearly: OUR gracious King, OUR Queen!"

And if most of the teachers were "Uncle Toms, you know 'Yessir, Yessir, Yessir,'" there was one who would come around late at night in the boys' dormitory:

> He told us things like when a white man gave us a Bible and told us to look up and pray and close our eyes, and we were holding the Bible and looking up there and praying, he started taking our gold. And all of a sudden we felt something down around our feet, and we found ourselves just in a big pit, the gold gone. We were still holding the Bible and looking up. "Open your

> eyes, Fools!" he said. That was back in 1948. We got the message.

If all such influences contributed to Nzamba's awareness, there was also the longstanding respect for literacy itself, a point of family pride. Throughout his education, he had been conscious of its importance not just as a means of "getting ahead' or "becoming like a European" but as a means of liberation from such values. The "white man's magic", reading and writing, was of great value in itself. Nzamba heard this early on from his father: "I want you to have the best". He knew the history of his uncle's father who "started, first, really the whole thing":

> He had been working in the city in the early twenties, and had learned how to read and write. He had been arrested. The Europeans would go to a chief and say, "We need houseboys," and they would take people by force, kids who looked smart, who could understand a few English words like "Yessir", "Yes Mamisahaab". They could cook coffee and serve Europeans. Those people were very smart. So he was indentured and taught how to read just a few things. He was the one who came up with the idea, "I will never let my children go through this."

Literacy "changes people in terms of their outlook on the world," Nzamba says, and he tells me of a cousin in the city who has taught himself to read and write and reads aloud the newspaper to whoever comes to listen. "This guy has never been to school; the literacy that he has has expanded his view so much that he's not, for all practical purposes, a guy from the village. He's a guy of the <u>world</u>."

Today, Nzamba says that if he had himself never

been to school:

> I would be an assistant to my father in traditional African medicine. With five wives, and many children, and someone who didn't know anything beyond the boundaries of his clan's land. An ignorant person . . . in terms of the larger world today. I would know nothing about it. My father knows a lot about us, but you ask him about anything outside the country or even our region: that he doesn't know.

But Nzamba is critical of the kind of education he received, particularly to the extent to which he has been influenced by the Western approach to learning:

> What is so sacred about the European design of scholarship? Why can't we have a different design in our own, the way that we approach our problems in society, in the physical world, in the metaphysical world? Why not? Why base everything on scholarship as it was defined by Aristotle and Plato two thousand years ago?

He feels that his own work, as a professor of African studies, is circumscribed by the ways he has been taught to view the world. "The theoretical interpretation of the world is necessarily different from country to country and from people to people because their experiences are different. Yet the theoretical framework of my work is very Western European". Longing to make his own writing accessible to his people--whom it is intended to benefit--, he sees that it must be done differently, "in some more sensible language."

> I would have to sit down and devise an African way. I'm suggesting a very radical departure from our colonial masters' thinking to our own, but it's very difficult to unlearn what you have learned.
> You know how we'd get to it? We'd go back to the villages and literally study what logic these men and women have, and how they arrive at conclusions about

> certain questions, and what their theory in the thinking is, but you know we have ignored all this in the name of European civilization, Western European civilization. Anything that an African does is "primitive" and "stupid". Somebody has to go and investigate this.

More than regret at the intellectual distance from African thought caused by his education, Nzamba feels an acute sense of personal loss:

> I have lost . . . [he pauses] . . . awareness. It is very difficult, because every time I try to go back and be taught again, to our cultural roots, I can't really fit. It's superficial. I cannot understand the sophistication involved in our culture. For example, when we talk about men and women being possessed when they are dancing. This is incomprehensible to me--that somebody can be completely dry and die, by being possessed, serious business. If I try to put myself into that situation I cannot. It's incomprehensible, I don't understand. Or when they talk about customs, in the abstract, the unknown, I don't know what they're talking about. I try to pretend and ask questions, yet I feel that I have lost something so much so. It's irreparable. I'm sure there's a lot to do with the African psychology and the European psychology. But mine is all European, and unless I'm able to fit within the psychological framework of African interpretation, I'll never understand. And since I missed it, these are the kinds of things that you just cannot learn intellectually. You have to live them. Do you see what I'm saying? And I've missed the living aspect of my learning.

Comments on Nzamba. Our discussions centered around the question of cultural identification and the psychological and social damage done to the "successful" African schooled under the colonial system. It was a system with the objective of manipulation and control. Through promoting obedience, passivity and semi-literacy, with a curriculum that explicitly rejected everything African, schooling successfully alienated

those who went through the system from felt knowledge of African life. The student, highly motivated by the prestige carried by literacy and education, soon came to embrace the same values, ways of interpreting and communicating about the world, thus rejecting his own in favor of the false promise.

Nzamba's sense of cultural loss came in part from being unable to actively participate in African traditional life, of course. More importantly, what he was learning in school effectively cut him off from his culture, through a curriculum that distorted realities and within an emotional context that encouraged denial, rejection of those realities. We have seen how all that was talked about, read and written was within the British reference. On the level of language itself, in primary school, where the vernacular was used, these were texts translated from English into the vernacular--not, as might have been, transcription of indigenous material. Aside from raising the difficulty of understanding the foreign reference, it precluded learning about or building on one's experience outside of school. The content of learning was controlled by the British examination system, and promoted by teachers, either British or African, who were themselves products of the system and unquestioning of its values and precepts. Methods used encouraged imitation rather than initiative or questioning, reproduction of what one was told rather than critical or imaginative perspectives.

With schooling in the English language, emphasis was on correctness and repetition of given knowledge, rather than on experimentation or discovery. What one was and knew was thus kept outside the schoolroom door.

Added to all this was the marriage of Britain with the Christian church. If the curriculum, content, methods all excluded African reality as being without literature, without history, without import for these young Africans, the missionary influence provided an emotional underpinning, mostly focused on fear, that convinced them that "primitive" and "pagan" went together, and that "education" and "salvation" could be found through rejection of what one was. Hymns replaced songs, and dance was forbidden; Western dress was worn at all times; one's new name, like the new clothes, meant giving up one's ancestry; one's father was a "witch-doctor" and the color black the color of the frightening, three-nosed Devil.[1]

The effectiveness of these various aspects for Nzamba depended largely on his readiness to accept them, the eagerness with which he pursued excellence within that system, with the countering influence of personal experience outside. For there was great contrast between the few "educated" and their life in school, and the vast majority of non-literate, non-Christians out of school. When out of school, one was surrounded by the traditional culture,

though unable to fully participate in it. Further, the realities of colonial exploitation and, during the war, blatant cruelties, were manifest--but "our consciousness [of these] was muted because of fear." One could not deny the contradictions--only repress them.

Even in the minimal picture presented in Nzamba's account, it should be evident that there was no simple dichotomy between "two cultures", or a given moment (entering school) where "this" became pitted against "that". Nzamba was born into a colonial culture, however much it directly touched only a few individuals in the remote region where he lived. It was never a simple matter of imposition or conquest by the British or the missionaries, for the colonized Africans participated in both practical ways, through service, and more deeply: in the reverence with which the white European was held, in the fanatic embrace of Christian doctrine as presented to them, in the ignorance or blindness to the meaning behind it all--such that there seemed limitless vulnerability. If there are political or sociological explanations for the success of the colonial system, these are never wholly satisfactory. "How is it you people get to our heads?" is a question Nzamba asks repeatedly. He is well-read himself in the works of Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Paolo Freire--all of whom in different ways write of how "the Oppressor is housed within the Oppressed" (to use

Freire's succinct phrase).[2] However, he cannot personally find an answer to his question or, I think, wholly forgive his people and that part of himself that so eagerly collaborated.

It is only partly true that what Nzamba brought with him to his schooling was the broadly described gestalt of the colonized African, or that his experience is purely representative of "fortunate" young Africans able to get schooling at all. The particular circumstances of his personal life surely contribute to that experience and to his perception of the whole as he tells it today. A playwright might see dramatic tension in the child's relationships with the adults most important to him. The mother, a recent Christian convert, literally takes him away from his father to live with another man, and tries to divorce him from what was in fact her <u>own</u> denied culture. The father, a traditional doctor, illiterate and unschooled, but wise in the inherited knowledge of the culture, never outrightly interferes, but somehow speaks to the young boy more truthfully. As Nzamba remembers them (and stil speaks of them today), there was a harshness, a certain craziness from the one; love and reasonableness from the other. When given the choice, as tradition allowed, the boy chooses the father, forcing his mother to follow him back (thus disrupting <u>her</u> life). And yet, because he is a schoolboy he cannot fully

identify with the father, or become what the tradition requires. And there is, of course, the uncle--the educated uncle and his aware and angry father--representing a very different, modern tradition of literacy and worldliness that somewhere at an early age made an unforgettable impression.

Thus, if Nzamba says, "our lives were divided into three worlds"--the world of the forefathers, of the Christian orientation, and of the "white man's magic", literacy--there is a unique configuration of his personal life which must have deeply affected the ways that he experienced the culture of the school.

Nzamba's case demonstrates a paradox, for if on the one hand, the experience presented him with continual conflict and undoubtedly a grave personal confusion regarding "who am I", on the other hand,--as comes through in the tone with which he speaks of his very real accomplishments--his success is both a tribute to diligent work and, conceivably, an outgrowth of the process of literacy and learning itself. Something, in other words, is inherent to his achievement in both the language and the forms of thought learned through it that, in spite of its alienating effect on a cultural level, nevertheless was strengthening and positive. It gave him, for that matter, the means by which--as circumstances changed and in the course of maturity--he would come to the kind of recognitions and appraisals he holds

today. It is both the nature of literacy itself, as well as the taking in of the language with which to express ever widening experience that help to create the "new person", however much this will also be accomplished with a sense of loss. The result, as he has described it, is double-edged at best: on the one hand, he appreciates all that his education gave him for access to knowledge about the world; on the other, he suffers sense of loss in terms of his African identity, which he feels is most real: "I have lost awareness. . . . I have missed the living aspect of my learning."

Selected Issues and Illustrations

While all of the persons interviewed experienced a school environment that in fundamental ways contrasted with their original culture, not all of them in our conversations focused directly on the issue of "culture" or spoke of themselves and their experience in such terms. Aside from Nzamba, Phyl and Ruth provide interesting persepctives on the question of cultural identity because of their particular interest today in the problem.

Cultural identification. Both Nzamba and Phyl speak of themselves and their life experiences in terms of dichotomies: belonging and not belonging to either of two very different worlds, as they see it. Their sense of cultural identification is always ambivalent and in some ways unresolvable,

Nzamba, for example, says of himself:

> . . . my orientation and socialization have been very European, . . . so this kind of love/hate relationship between my European orientation and the African and the conflict between them. . . . I feel so strongly about it. I hate it with a passion, so much so, yet a good deal of me is European, and yet I'm an African.

Phyl contrasts the Western with the oriental, seeing the two as in opposition within herself. Speaking of her education, she says,

> I loved it. At the time, I loved it. Looking at it now, I think it was a form of miseducation. I'm ambivalent in a way. Looking at it, miseducation in the sense that it didn't give me enough oriental, Asian roots and pride in my own. And yet . . . in terms of content (and this is a very Western way of analyzing it!) it would be one-sided, mostly Western. In terms of practice, it was also very Western in a way: that process includes discipline, which I think has been very useful you know, and yet that very discipline, because it is Western, it also stifled somehow a little of the oriental in me, the <u>me</u> in me, the emotional part. . . .

Like Nzamba, she grieves at how deeply the West has affected traditional culture, both broadly and within herself:

> Among Asians, we are the best and the worst. The best in the sense that we speak English, understand the West. You talk about the Renaissance--many of us would be able to join you in that! Talk about Shakespeare, o.k., fine. And yet when we go back . . . it's good you're talking in English, but what about your dreams? Yes, I dream in English . . . but your dreams are your own; therefore they should be in your own language. So in that regard, we are the least Asian among the Asians; we are the most Western.

Ruth, in contrast, says quite bluntly, "I never think about being bi-cultural at all". Instead, she views the problem as that of personal self-identity. She points out that her dissertation topic, "Measuring Inter-Cultural

Sensitivity", is a good indication of her view: no one can escape the pull of cultures in a multi-cultural world, and the real issue is to "be yourself";

> You see, I think the biggest adjustment, the biggest demand on anybody who is educated in my country is to be able to fit into both worlds . . . without changing your personality structure. To be yourself and fit when you are placed in such a situation, to fit in other situations without being artificial about it.

Without assuming to provide explanations for the differences in perspective they hold as adults today, it is interesting to look more closely at the ways that their school experience against the out-of-school context contributed to their sense of cultural identity. As Nzamba's account reflects, for him the "myth" was made so convincing in the schooling context that "reality" became despised and in some ways inaccessible. If this had to do in part with expectations brought to the school, it was also the language/world of schooling itself: the thought patterns and meanings conveyed by the language, the values and assumptions held by teachers, the methods used.

Language and thought structure. Nzamba's speculations about the impossibility for him to truly understand his culture point to the question of logic. He says that there must be a way to find a language appropriate to expressing the traditional culture in writing, one which he doubts he would be capable of, for "it is very difficult to unlearn what you

have learned." "Somebody," he says (betraying his own Western way of solving problems!) "should go and study the logic. We'd go back and literally study what logic these men and women have, how they arrive at conclusions." For the "theoretical interpretation of the world is different from country to country" and the challenge is to "devise an African way . . . a radical departure from the colonial master's thinking to our own."

His thoughts on this subject echo the view concerning the relation between language and thought that a given language through its very structure helps to control cultural perspective on experience. Western education brings not simply a referential base and core of knowledge but a new way of thinking and organization of knowledge built into the structure of the language itself. For those from nonliterate communities, an additional consideration is the effect of literacy on the structure of thought, particularly in contrast to the logic of the oral tradition. The written recording of experience forces elaboration of information and, in the Western mode, linearity of expression, that contrasts with the kind of communication passed through the oral tradition. The latter uses, instead, such linguistic modes as repetitiveness, rhythms, metaphor and imagery, in part, it has been suggested, as mnemonic aids, as well as having at its command the entire repertoire of nonverbal

forms of communication in the face to face passing of information. It is not simply a matter of style, but of ways of thinking.[3]

My conversations with Phyl went in considerable detail into the nature of the language/thought relation, and the problems that have arisen for her in this regard. In discussing the difference between her original language and English, her analysis, while in part directed at structural matters, focuses primarily on culturally significant meanings, those which today make it difficult for her to move back and forth easily between the two:

> Our language tends to be picturesque. It has a lot of imagery. And we tend to be always in the passive voice. For example, we always say, "Somebody is killed." You don't name the subject. It's always "something is always being done to me". So with this it already takes a bit longer to say. Even our national anthem, there's a line, "And for you [she repeats the phrase in dialect, then translates], for you, talking about the nation, I am ready to die." See? For you I am ready to die. This kind of thing. Why don't we make it more active, like "For you I am ready to <u>kill</u>"? Of which we never thought, you know.

One sees here, her own disaffection from what she sees as passivity in her culture, that she finds reflected in the structure of the language itself. She gives a different example:

> Look, for example, at the value our culture puts on the close group. In our language, we have a word for "the two of us" excluding the rest, where in English it's just "we". Then we have a word for "we" where everyone is included. We don't like to alienate the group by saying "they-out-there"--you are <u>all</u> part of it. Our

> "we-ness" may be more close than our "we-ness" with the rest. Our language makes the difference.

Though difficult to follow--translation being impossible, as English has only one way to say what her language differentiates--the close binding between the structural forms and the cultural meaning comes through. Here, the language reflects what elsewhere she describes as her culture's lack of emphasis on individual identity.

Like Nzamba, throughout her formal education, Phyl feels that she learned a way of thinking that has been for her only with difficulty "unlearned". This began very early on. When Phyl went to primary school at the age of seven, all learning took place in the English language: ". . . people would laugh at you [if you spoke the dialect], especially in a class like arithmetic, history and social studies . . . all these would be in English." And because the dialect was spoken only by "those wearing wooden shoes," she came to sahre in the emotional separation from the uneducated class who spoke that language. Later, at the prestigious private boarding school she was sent to ("because I was the youngest, I was given the very best") children were fined for speaking anything but English, and she comments, this kind of immersion meant that she now speaks English far better than those who went through the public school system.

She was a very enthusiastic student throughout, one of her favorite classes in high school being philosophy, out of which grew a close-knit group of friends who called themselves "Seekers of Wisdom" meeting weekly in a self-styled seminar with their teacher.

How successfully her education left her quite ignorant of her "Asian roots" can be seen in her memories, told with humor today, of having to teach Asian history and the language as a young nun in the schools:

> . . . when I was teaching about Southeast Asia, it was most embarrassing because I knew more European history and American history. I could make these more interesting than oriental history. For Asian history, I told my students to go to the embassies of the different nations--it was a way for them to find out, but that's just because I couldn't do it myself!

She used the same inventive procedure for the same purpose when she had to teach the national language. Not knowing it sufficiently as a young teacher, "I learned to be creative. . . . I had my students listen to a piece of music and told them to make a story based on it, all written in the dialect--that's how I avoided my own lack of knowledge of the language!" It was also as a teacher that she was sent by her convent out to the rural schools, where she discovered how irrelevant her own education had been to their experience. She was to teach them English--college students--and began, with them, by teaching Logic.

As a graduate student, getting a Master's degree

in social work, she learned the rigors of Western scholarship under a Dutch professor, and then as she moved on to doctoral research, she came to recognize the degree to which she had succeeded in learning what she calls "one view of reality". Today she sees her learning in a political light: With some exasperation, she says, "for me, what's the big idea of having measured to the nth degree of accuracy what is only practical to that specific portion of reality . . . and once you have gotten to that hole or square, you cannot move anymore. No, that's not for me . . . that is the height of colonial imperialism!"

The ease with which Phyl moved into the language world of her schooling must be seen against the context of her cultural and family background. Her country had long been influenced by Western culture, for centuries under the Christian influence, and with the more recent accessibility of education, dominated by European thought and the English language. Within her own family--where she was, importantly, the youngest, who was "given the best"--her older siblings came before her in schooling and were her first teachers. She remembers an older sister, her babysitter, who told her stories: "when I was very small, I knew Evangeline, I knew St. Elmo, all those stories--they are all there now in my head".

She tagged along with her older brother to his

school:

> My brother was very good at declamation at school . . . there were regular dramas at my father's school. Although I was small, I would go to their convocations where they presented Shakespeare plays, all sorts of things. . . . I would go to see my brother, and when he would recite his piece, I would also recite with him.

Her grandfather was her first religious mentor:

> My grandfather would tell us all sorts of stories. He was not literate, but he knew the Bible from the beginning. Later on I was reading Wordsworth--the sunset poem that goes "When the night is beginning to lower . . . " and there is the image of this little girl going to her father. . . . It reminded me of my grandfather. There was no electricity in those days, and he had a petrol lamp, the kind you put air into so that it will glow. Every evening at sunset he would do that, and he would tell us stories about the Bible, from Creation until the end. We were little children, and I remember I was fascinated more by the light--it becomes yellow, then it becomes bluish white, and finally it is white. And by that time he has already told us the story from the Bible! He would go on philosophizing, using the Bible and all . . . for me it is a beautiful, beautiful memory.

The thoroughness with which she incorporated Western forms of thought--along with acquisition of the language--is a matter of deep concern to her today, in part because of her chosen work. Her commitment to working with the poor and nonliterate in her country as a "consciousness-raiser" and Catholic activist, has brought her directly up against difficulties of communication that have to do less, she feels, with problems of social class difference, than with the fact that in spite of her knowledge of the dialect, her <u>thoughts</u> are in the Western framework. She remembers only recently writing a letter in her dialect to her convent ("I wanted

them to see that the dialect is important"):

> I wrote the letter in dialect, but it was not flowing in the dialect. Because it was the Western logic still that was coming out. It had been translated. So this is why when I finished with the letter, I knew that they were Western thoughts, they were also Western structure. Although speaking in the dialect, even if I had given it to a farmer who could read, he would not understand it!

Though raised speaking the dialect at home, she finds that her thoughts are so controlled by Western structure, that today, when she is talking with the farmers, "It takes me a little bit longer. My way is first to let them talk, so that I can, you know, I can get in. Otherwise, I would be talking the dialect, but I am really speaking English."

Language context and cultural contrasts. My interviews with Ruth, from Southern Africa, followed those with Nzamba. Influenced as I was by his persuasive views, I assumed parallels in her experience, only to find to my surprise that in spite of broad contextual similarities, her feelings about the experience and her explanation were very different. What struck me in comparing the two was her implicit acceptance of the educational system, a pragmatic assumption, given the realities, that if one did not become educated and learn English, one could not "be somebody", one was "doomed". Therefore, in spite of what she sees as overweening discipline in the schools and an overemphasis on religious instruction, in particular, all in all, it was all for the best. In looking

more closely, it became clear that in spite of individual differences--for persons will react very differently to similar situations in any case--there are other significant influences that help to explain her reactions.

School/home contrasts. While Nzamba constantly felt "torn and pushed" between the school world and outside, Ruth instead does not remember any particular conflict of this sort. When I ask her whether she remembers any aspect of the traditional life to be included in the learning context at school, she says not; asked if she was aware of the absence, she replies: "When you are a child, you don't think . . . your thoughts are very . . . you just look at what you are dealing with. You don't do much more, so as to say this is not right, or something. You take it as given, especially when there was no contrast. We didn't have anything to compare it to."

An important difference between them is the fact that Ruth's family had long been converted to Christianity, and that her parents had both received what for their time was a high level of education. Thus, unlike Nzamba, she was in a sense one of a "second generation". Schooling in her time was more accessible ("it was not unusual") and though boarding school was still a privilege, school fees were low and in her case, there was no question that she would go to school. "I was not a particularly outstanding student," she says, with

characteristic modesty.

Learning content. As in Nzamba's case, although the English language was not taught until later, from the very beginning, "the whole educational system was biased in favor of the English." In many ways, the content of learning distorted as well as glossed over historical realities; one's own cultural traditions were not explored, not made to "mean anything":

> African history--and I'm not even talking about the history of my country, I'm just talking about general African history--was from literature books that we read as textbooks. Take the history of Southern Africa. We learned about the coming of the Portuguese settlers and all that kind of stuff. And how Africa all began with the Egyptian pyramids [she laughs]. But it was nothing, really. Well, it was relevant in that you learned about South Africa, but being in our country meant very little to us. The Cape was like Florida to a child who lives here, like another world. It didn't mean anything. We learned about it in books, and that was it.

She feels there was a surfeit of religious instruction. Although today she is a practising Christian, she says,

> When I was growing up, I used to think I had too much religion. And it was meaningless to me because at that school, sometimes we had to be in church three times a day. We went to chapel in the morning, we prayed and had devotions then classes. The first subject was always religious knowledge, which was just an extension . . . most of the time it was teaching religion like the Bible, and this would be coupled with preaching. . . . Honestly, I think they overdid it. I always did poorest in relgious instruction.

Regarding Christianity in the school, she felt there was "too much" and that "there was a lot of hypocrisy around, people trying to please the authorities, the missionaries,

but they were not genuine." But she did not herself question the Christian way of life, nor feel personally disturbed by the equations made by the missionaries that traditional dress and ceremonies are pagan, heathen, inferior.

> Western clothes were like a mark that you have moved from this way of living to another one. You had accepted Christianity. I grew up not wanting to wear traditional dress (I didn't wear them at home, anyway.). I didn't have a big craving for them, especially given the attitude that went with it.

She shared in such attitudes:

> Take, for example, the famous "Reed Dance", where the girls all wear very little, go to pick up reeds for the queen's huts, and then come back and dance. There are a couple of days' rituals built into it. For my generation, my age group, there was a tendency to look down on the ceremony. I thought their attire . . . the thought of exposing your body that much . . . was disgusting! Showing your body meant that you were less educated and immoral.*

Cultural characteristics. On a personal level, for Ruth, there was little discrepancy between the values promoted in the school and those held at home. An important contributing factor leading to acceptance, she feels, is what she describes as her culture's traditional respect for authority and tolerance of difference. To point out that this is a unique characteristic, she compares hers to a neighboring ethnic group which she sees as being far more

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*"Today," she laughs, "it's just the reverse! My sister sent me a postcard of the Reed dancers and wrote, 'Next year, I'm going to be one of these!'"

volatile, aggressive, and rebellious. The prevailing attitude in her culture was to emulate the British--"to be educated meant to be Western"--, and acceptance of what was set forth in the schools was strengthened by the cultural attitude of respect:

> Our culture insists on respect for authority. You can add to this, respect for the white person. It didn't come entirely from the whites; it was also part of our tradition. Should I respect my headmaster because he was a teacher? or because he was white? Both, our people would like to believe. They exhibit the same kind of respect in each case.

One remembers the very different characterization of his culture by Nzamba--a hatred for the white man, muted by fear, an attitude exacerbated by the political realities of the time. In this regard, it is important, as Ruth points out, that national independence at a later time in her country was achieved peacefully. She speculates that the difference can be attributed as much to the specific national temperament as to the historical facts.*

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*The historical difference is strategic, for while Nzamba's country was conquered by the British, the people of Ruth's invited the British in, as protection against warring neighbors. She explains that even before the coming of the missionaries, there was anticipation of their arrival: "The King today tells a story of how the former king had had a vision that a different people were coming bringing two things: a scroll and a button. The scroll was the Bible, and the button, money. God told the King to accept the scroll but not the button. Unfortunately, we didn't listen and took both!" The story shows, she points out, how the foreigners were both anticipated and welcomed.

Styles of interaction. In some ways, then, Ruth points out that the school environment was consistent with the cultural tradition, and particularly in the ways that children were expected to behave and interact. School required obedience, emphasizing respect for authorities to an extreme. The matron, who was African, "insisted that you kneeled down every time you spoke to her. Just like a wife in front of a husband or a child in front of her parents!" Teachers, whether African or not, were consistently authoritarian, often overly harsh, sometimes hostile. But challenging the teacher was out of the question, and this, too, was an extension of cultural values. The teacher/student relation as Ruth describes it carries over to how learning took place, how acceptance of what was being learned was assured:

> When a teacher is teaching, they are the ones who know, and you are the student, you don't know, you're there to learn. So they should give you everything they want you to know. And not expect you to give back anything. So if instead a teacher constantly starts firing questions at students, you think the teacher is stupid or ignorant, he doesn't know what he is doing! He's supposed to be teaching! And that's where conflicts come in. . . . It happened to me when I started teaching, coming from college with all its bright ideas and new methods and what not. I'd think, "I'm being fair, giving them a chance to speak", and the students would look at me, thinking, "What's wrong with you?"

The unquestioning respect for what the teacher says is only consistent with the cultural tradition of respect for the elder. Ruth explains that this goes back to the non-literate world:

> This is why they put so much stress on respect for older people: it is because they know. You can understand how it came to be with a culture with no books, nobody writing. The knowledge of the culture keeps the culture together, the people together, and it is in the minds of the older. So that if you are confronted with a situation, the first thing is to go and look for advice from older people, because they know better.

Language use is affected directly by social hierarchies. When you speak to the matron, to the teacher, "you have to talk in a certain manner, a very polite manner. . . . If I talk to somebody I know is older, I'll have to say something in different words, I have to show a little bit of respect."

If at school, the emphasis in classrooms was on listening, not talking back, and being careful to address the older person with special forms of respect, this was consistent with what the child learned early on. Related to this, Ruth says, is another characteristic of her culture, the importance of not asserting oneself verbally, or expressing strong feelings. She tells an amusing story to illustrate:

> In our way, you're supposed to suppress emotion, suppress it whether it's happy feelings or sad. We learn to keep things in. It's never overtly taught to you. Somebody would come and tell you some very good news, and by the way they spoke you wouldn't know that it was very good, very exciting news.
>
> There's a joke often told about a house on fire and how a person from my culture would behave if he had to report it. He would come, first knocking very softly on the door [she laughs] the person insidethen says, "Come in", the person goes in and kneels down very slowly next to the door and says [this in a near whisper] "There's a house out there on fire."

There has been considerable discussion in the literature concerning the discrepancies or lack of these between school and home norms of verbal interaction.[4] Ruth would concur that where both environments require a degree of obedience, lack of self-assertion or active participation from the child, there will be little problem of personal adjustment to school for the child. We can compare her experience to that of Anya to point up the difference. Anya tells of how at home, and in the culture at large, she remembers much discussion, in which even as a child she was encouraged to participate, whereas at school she was forced into silence both by not knowing the language and by having to conform to an authoritarian method. This was a great source of frustration to her, blocking her naturally inquisitive and talkative self, her creativity. (see pp. 70-77, Chapter Three). Anya sees the school environment as purposefully aimed at pacifying the otherwise rebellious people, at controlling and forcing obedience--an extension of colonial dominance.

Personal factors. It would be a distortion of Ruth's personal experience to suggest that she herself was either unquestioning or passive in the course of her schooling. In fact, if she has "nothing but negative memories of that school," this is because she found the extreme authoritarian mode overbearing and intolerable. Although she says that, given the constant sense of threat of punishment, she "would

do anything to please", to "survive", and laughingly admits that in some ways that made her an "obedient conformist", nevertheless she points out that in fact she maintained her own integrity. She was never trusted--by the matron--to be a good "prefect", refusing to spy on other students if they violated the rules; she says that in school, she had a wide variety of friends, refusing to ally herself with one group or another. Her independence is reflected in her comments about herself today--criticizing those who "try so hard to fit to the point where they make themselves ridiculous" she says, "I have no idea why some people act that way--you wonder where is the real person at the time."

What accounts for the fact that some people, even as very young children, will more willingly conform to the socializing norms required of them, and others will refuse, is a question that is complex if perhaps unanswerable. Ruth's answer, concerning herself ("How do you account for your self-confidence, your sense of independence?") is outright;

> I think I got my confidence in part because of my family responsibilities. I was the first girl. Girls have much more responsibility than boys. I was like a second mother to my younger brothers and sisters. During the holidays I always took that role.

Ruth's own mother was for her an example of personal integrity and initiative. Having completed a high level of schooling, for her time, she went on to nurses' training, and while Ruth was still young, single-handedly was responsible for a

rural health clinic: "She was wonderful. She was highly respected in the community. She was hard working. I don't know how she managed to do some of the things she did. The raising of nine children and the working at the clinic with no aid. . . . " Her mother raised her daughter to make decisions for herself, and to value the rewards of hard work:

> At home, I did a lot of manual work. My mother insisted on it. It's part of our life. A girl must know how to work things out and rough it, must know how to cook, so in my family we girls took turns, even though there was somebody sometimes helping. . . . Generally, girls are taught how to cook at a very early stage. When I was younger, my mother would tell me what to cook; then it came to the point if I asked her, she'd say, "Well, you think it out for yourself," and I'd have to prepare meals for the whole family.
> . . . at times I remember my mother insisting that the person who was helping (there was somebody sometimes helping) stay at home and cook while we went out to labor. . . . I think my mother was trying to put this idea into our heads, not to despise manual labor.

We have seen in Chapter One that in certain respects, Ruth's schooling resulted in a degree of anxiety and lack of confidence concerning self-expression in the language, and in writing. This may be attributable to a cultural norm of verbal reticence that was complemented by a method of teaching that discouraged independent inquiry and stressed avoidance of error. Nevertheless, in other respects, Ruth's personal integrity was not squashed by the schooling environment at all, as can be seen in her refusal to adopt the prevailing attitudes concerning "fitting" into Western ways of behavior or thought--any more than she was willing to "fit" into

certain aspects of the traditional cultural norm. As she says, the main problem is "to be yourself and fit . . . without being artificial about it."

Summary

The school experience of those interviewed reflects an imposition of Western culture through an ethnocentric curriculum, authoritarian methods of teaching/learning that discouraged challenge or dialogue, and teacher attitudes that similarly ignored or denied the value of the child's primary language/world. The effectiveness of these for promoting acculturation depended considerably on outside factors: attitudes towards education and the culture represented by the school, consistent or divergent styles of interaction, family relationships, and individual personality. Sapir writes, in this regard:

> It is a dangerous thing for the individual to give up his identification with such cultural patterns as have come to symbolize for him his own personality integration. The task of external adjustment to social needs may require such abandonment on his part and consciously he may crave nothing more passionately, but if he does not wish to invite disharmony and inner weakness in his personality, he must see to it, consciously or unconsciously, that every abandonment is made good by the acquisition of a psychologically equivalent symbolism.[5]

In the next chapter, the effects of the language learning process and the pressures of cultural adaptation on self-identity will be explored.

FOOTNOTES

[1]For a discussion of the racism inherent in the language as connected with Christian teaching, see Ali A. Mazrui, "The Racial Boundaries of the English Language", in The Political Sociology of the English Language (The Hague Mouton & Co., 1975), Chapter 4, pp. 69-86.

[2]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (Boston: The Orion Press, 1965).

[3]Extensive discussion of the implications of the oral tradition on thought and social forms of interaction can be found in Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," Language and Social Context, ed. Pier Paolo Giglioli (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 311-357. Also see Mazrui, pp. 78-80; and Walter Ong, "Oral Culture and the Literate Mind," Minority Language and Literature, ed. Dexter Fisher (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1977).

[4]See for example, Courtney B. Cazden, "Problems for Education; Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment," in Language as a Human Problem, eds. Einar Haugen and Morton Bloomfield (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

[5]Edward Sapir, Culture, Language and Personality (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, p. 159.

CHAPTER V

SELF IDENTITY

> My quarrel with the English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter in quite another way. If the language was not my own, it might be the fault of the language; but it might also be my fault. Perhaps the language was not my own because I have never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test.
>
> James Baldwin, "Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare"[1]

Introduction

Self-identity is intertwined with language in complex ways. Language is one of the most important means by which one comes to interrelate with the world and to give it meaning. In the earliest time of life, it helps to define social relationships; it is the means for knowing the self and for developing and expressing oneself within such relationships. Language gives structure to experience and feeling, and so is in some ways restrictive; it permits for the understanding and expression of these, and so is liberating.

In the bilingual situation the process is complicated. Depending on the ways by which the language is learned and encouraged to be used, one's sense of personal

identity, so intimately connected with the first language, may either be developed and enhanced or repressed and denied. Mastery of a second language has rich potential for access to new kinds of knowledge and personal relationships, for transcendence of ethnocentric perspectives. However, when acquisition of the second language includes denial or denigration of the first and all it carries, there is much risk. As Dell Hymes has written:

> The embedding of one's most meaningful experiences in a particular means of speech is common in the world. To succeed in eradicating the means of speech that children bring to schools might be to succeed in denying them access to sources of their own identity and feeling.[2]

We have already seen how repression of a first language will not necessarily affect the technical acquisition of the second language or acculturation into the world represented by that language. Nzamba and Phyl are good examples of this. On the other hand, how the experience affected their sense of themselves is a different issue.

I will focus in this chapter on what the people I interviewed have to say on this issue, including aspects of their experiences and feelings about these since the time of their schooling and language learning. The different aspects about which a language teacher can do something will be identified. The presupposition here is that the teacher will attempt not only to promote language learning and the broadening of cultural perspectives, but also to

preserve and enhance a sense of personal identity and autonomy. There are many risks to the self inherent in cross-cultural experience, but it may be possible for a teacher to take steps so that the inevitable social change occurs in positive ways with a minimum of personal alienation, sense of confusion or conflict. The new language may be taught in such a way that rather than promoting repression of self, it can rather "belong" to the self.

The statement by James Baldwin quoted above suggests that for him there was a clear division between language as a form he learned to imitate and, on the other hand, a personal or authentic self grounded in experience which the language did not reflect or serve. And yet, stepping back a moment, we see that this cannot be entirely true. To the extent that one is learning at all, the self is involved; knowing and using words, even parroting words, engages the self and thought in some ways. The degree of inauthenticity is always relative, not absolute. Nevertheless, Baldwin's comment brings up the main issue for this chapter: how learning the new language within the new cultural context affects personal identity and one's sense of authenticity. Further, it suggests one kind of resolution to potential conflict, available certainly to writers: the use of language to connect directly with one's felt experience. The extent that learning the new language affords the possibility of

such connection may be crucial to the cross-cultural experience as it affects identity.

Literature provides us with many examples of highly successful but psychologically alienated persons who, in the course of their education into a new language and culture, have denied their own and have seemingly lost connection with a part of themselves. A stark case, for example, is the husband in "Song of Lawino" by the Ugandan writer, Okot P'Bitek. Here Lawino mourns his figurative death:

> My husband has read much
> He has read extensively and deeply
> He has read among white men
> And he is clever like white men.
>
> And the reading
> Has killed my man.
> In the ways of his people
> He has become
> A stump.[3]

Richard Hoggart, in The Uses of Literacy, speaks of the "scholarship boy" moving from working-class England into "educated" England as a different kind of "stump": "He has something of a blinkered pony about him" as he moves up the ladder of success and away from what he was.[4] One thinks, too, of Bitzer, the anti-hero and star pupil in Dickens' Hard Times, whose every effort is to mimic and anticipate what Professor Gradgrind wants him to say and do, and whose distortion of personality leads directly to mean and evil acts in the course of the tragic plot.[5]

The process may on the other hand have positive, liberating effects. This was the case for Gavone Ledda, the Sardinian writer, whose life was depicted in the film Padre Padrone.[6] Through schooling, Ledda was saved from a harsh, dehumanized life. Illiterate and nearly mute at the age of eighteen, he joined the army where he was taught to read and write Italian and found his voice. Interestingly enough, when he went on to the university, he studied linguistics. After writing his autobiography, he returned to the island, where he now is working on transcribing stories from the oral literature. Like Baldwin, he seems to have found the means to connect with his past through language (made his own). His return to his roots seems an important symbolic choice.

In another autobiographical piece, Richard Rodriguez describes his own journey from a poor Chicano childhood, through schooling, to a certain crisis point as a graduate student, when he found he had to confront "how far I had moved from my past."

> What I am about to describe to you has taken me twenty years to admit: The primary reason for my success in the classroom was that I couldn't forget that schooling was changing me, and separating me from the life I had enjoyed before becoming a student. (That simple realization!) For years I never spoke to anyone about this boyhood fear, my guilt and remorse. . . . From a very early age, I understood enough, just enough, about my experiences to keep what I knew vague, repressed, private, beneath layers of embarrassment. Not until the last months that I was a graduate student, nearly thirty years old, was it possible for me to think about the reasons for my success.[7]

The experience of schooling created a clear division: a separation of feeling from thought, action from reflection:

> With his family, the boy has the pleasure of an exuberant intimacy--the family's consolation in feeling public alienation. Lavish emotions texture home life. Then at school, the instruction is to use reason primarily. Immediate needs govern the pace of his parents' lives; from his mother and father he learns to trust spontaneity and non-rational ways of knowing. Then at school there is mental calm; teachers emphasize the value of a reflectiveness which opens a space between thinking and immediate action.[8]

Rodriguez describes his gradual alienation from home life and family, and in some ways from himself, in his assiduous pursuit of the "rational" world of book-learning. In spite of his success, he nevertheless sees now that in fact he was in some ways "the worst student, the great mimic, the last student who ever feels obliged to voice an opinion of his own." Though a voracious reader, he was "merely bookish . . . I lacked a point of view when I read." Always anxious for praise, he describes his behavior in a seminar:

> I had by that time become no different from other students around me. But though no different from them, I was more disappointing. The seminar room jargon coming from me sounded especially odd . . . (all clearly borrowed opinions. . . . No thought of my own). I spoke by then without trace of a Spanish accent. (I spoke and read French and Italian better than I could Spanish.) My eyes watched the instructor. My voice caught as I offered an answer. And when I was finally praised, there was an inevitable blush of contentment, a smile of modest praise on my face.[9]

And yet, he points out the contradiction that ultimately his schooling, which had in some ways alienated him forever from his childhood self, had also given him the means to resolve

that alienation. While working on his dissertation--on a subject he felt was of little interest to him--he began to read in other areas that came closer to an understanding of culture and social change, books that excited him and seemed closer to a real interest he had never pursued. Later, he returned to his parents' house for a few months:

> I noticed suddenly (watching carefully for evidence) the thin firm strands of the unconscious which bind generations. Of course people had been right, I concluded, when they recognized that my mother and I laughed the same way. (And, could it be possible that when my father spoke Spanish, he sounded a tone that I also achieved when I wrote English?) After the early relief, this return, however, brought a later suspicion, nagging until it led to a certain realization, that I had not side-stepped the impact of the years of my schooling. My desire to do so was the measure of just how much I remained an academic. Negatively (for that is how this idea first occurred to me): my ability and need to think so much (so abstractly!) about my life and my relationship to my parents was already indication of a long education. My mother and father, by comparison, did not pass their time thinking about the "cultural" meaning of their experience. It was I, who had been taught to conceptualize experience, who described their daily lives in an idea. And yet, positively: the ability to use abstract ways of thinking about experience had allowed me to shape into desire what would have been only indefinite longings in the British Museum. If, because of my schooling, I had become separated from my parents, my education had also given me in the end a way to speak and to care about that fact.[10]

It is tempting to see a dialectical model in his account: the original clash between home life (emotional, spontaneous, intimate and communal--and genuine) and school life (rational, deliberate, isolating--and inauthentic) with a synthesis in reflection and return. His retrospective analysis through writing describes a tension of opposites

and a conclusion that seems final partly because of the necessity to end the article.

The focus of his essay, it seems, is on the point he makes that schooling generally fosters imitative thought and alienation from self, and that for persons like himself, the experience is only a heightened example:

> The truer synonym for "education" is not learning but "imitation" . . . education is mainly a long, unglamorous and even demeaning process of acquiring skills and habits of mind--a nurturing never natural to the persons we were once, before first entering the classroom. [The case of a person like myself] exaggerates the difficulty of being a student, but his exaggeration reveals a general predicament. Others are changed as much as he. They too learn by imitation. They develop the skill of memory long before they become critical thinkers. . . .[11]

Aspects of his particular experience, however, suggest that the problem lies deeper than in the common socializing experience that schooling provides us all.[12] He notes, but does not explore, the implications of his Chicano identity in a racist society--mentioning that, as he grows older, others are disappointed that "this dark man" speaks the way they do, and are somehow affronted by his moving into their middle-class world. It is a subtle point he makes that the "exuberant intimacy" of his family life was "a consolation in feeling public alienation"; one would also like to know more about his loss of first language, as he tells us twice (in almost exactly the same words each time) that he managed to "lose every trace of his Spanish accent." Surely all these factors contributed significantly to the nature of his

experience.

As we have seen in this study, the people interviewed identify problems they see in their experience of education and language acquisition as tied directly to aspects of their class, race, and original culture. Baldwin deplores the imitative nature of his learning in the specific context of his anger at having had to learn the language of Shakespeare, as a black man in a white dominated world--only resolving this anger through bending the language to his own purposes. It would seem, generally, that the experience is qualitatively different for the child who moves from one culture to the new, however much it may be true that there are aspects of traditional education which affect all in an alienating way.

All of the persons interviewed showed a deep concern with the question of authenticity, a consciousness of the possible risks to self-identity involved in making such a transition. In different ways, their education denied them access to their original language and culture, so that as adults, many years after and now in many ways re-integrated with the past, they still express feelings and thoughts carried over from the earlier time when school pressures and lack of maturity kept these largely unconscious.

Particularly because language is so closely tied to who one is is the experience potentially threatening to sense of self. It would seem that a useful approach to

the question of self-identity as regards these people then would be to consider to what extent they feel that the language/culture they have learned is "their own", or to what extent they feel it as separate from their self-identity, a false overlay to who they feel they are. In the latter case, what are some of the problems that interfere with integrating the new language with their self-identity? Are there aspects of the learning experience that contribute directly to such feelings and which might be alterable by the language teacher?

The New Language and Self: Integration

Marvina: "Part of the me I was becoming." Marvina is most confident concerning her sense of identity as integrated with the language she learned to speak. As mentioned before, while very aware of the symbolic meanings associated with standard English and, conversely, black vernacular, she nevertheless feels that the language she uses is a reflection of her personal identity rather than of social status.

In Chapter Three (pp. 85-94) she recounts ways she pursued--and acquired--the standard variety of English that symbolized for her and her family the status of a "learned person", as well as being a practical requisite for achievement and success. She described the painstaking efforts at acquiring not only "correct" grammar and "twenty five cent words" but also at becoming what she calls "articulate",

not speaking "flat" or sounding "country". Learning was accompanied by continual rewards of being singled out as especially gifted, demonstrated by her frequent occasions to perform, recite, and to work together with her parents at perfecting the language. It is no wonder that she would come to consciously identify the language as "who I am".

Yet it is also true that for others, the language held strong symbolic value: being the language of the educated, white world it gave her entry, but it also suggested abandonment of her own class and ethnic group. For people in her own region, it represented the language of the "Northerner" and also of the black middle class--and for Marvina, this raised problems. From early on, she had been aware of class difference, and she recounts various ways that in her childhood she came to view the middle class as hostile and distant. She had always felt their attitude, the "We've got ours, and you've got yours to get," to be exclusive and condescending. There was conflict in her home when she herself decided to go to college--her father maintaining that she would "no longer be able to relate", her mother insisting that she should get all the education she could get. "That caused a significant rift in the family for a while." It was important for Marvina to dissociate herself from the adverse social connotations

of the standard language, and to instead clearly identify it as being simply "a part of the me I was becoming".

An incident she describes that occurred during her years in college demonstrates dramatically the contrast between Marvina's sense of her language as being "her own" and the way that others responded to what it rather represented symbolically to them. The incident points up her sense of personal integrity and independence, values long instilled in her by her mother, and the church. Her refusal to join groups and her constant discriminating between what she feels to be right and what pressures she feels put upon her by others stand out in her account.

The incident concerns her involvement in politics while she was a student during the late sixties. In terms of her activities, she was "very individualistic", participating only in those causes that "I felt a commitment to my self to get tuned into." "Even with the Black Movement," she remarked, "I was very discriminating."

> I was somewhat isolated from the rest of the black community in part because I led a sheltered life and I enjoyed maintaining that at college because I felt more secure. And that venturing out into the unknown, the black world of the more worldly people than I--I didn't know what I was going to get into. And I personally felt that I had gone to college to get an education, an academic education. At that time I was not aware as I am now that education is the total experience; it's not just what you get at school.

She was selective about her friends and what she did, and as a result, one of her friends--a woman who was with "the

in group" told her later that:

> The rest of the black students had got on her case because she associated with me, and I was considered not one of them. And part of that was just because . . . when I feel strongly about something, I feel strongly enough to stand up to it, no matter how unpopular my position might be. And at that particular time . . . taking the position I took was not popular; I am not anti-white.

Her language entered into all of this, at a time when to "speak proper" was considered a betrayal of the Black Movement:

> I was not confronted personally, but in the cafeteria I could get along with all the black students, and I would flirt with the guys, and . . . I'd love to use words. And sometimes they would say, "You come down to earth", you know, "Don't talk to us in a foreign language," and I wouldn't be bothered. If I wanted to finish a sentence, I'd do it, and then I'd come back and explain what I meant. They claimed that that was the reason they asked me to be the spokesperson . . . because I was articulate.

At the time, the administration of the college had ordered all black athletes to shave their moustaches or be barred from the team--which would mean losing their scholarships, and "goodbye college". "That hit home for me," Marvina tells me. "It was important for me to take a stand. And I was chosen to be spokesperson."

> You had been initiated if you could sport a moustache. It was not meant to be a political symbol; it was part of the black culture that marked your entry into manhood. And yet the white administrators felt that they were not clean-shaven. They were imposing a lot of white standards on the white community, and to me, they were challenging everything that I have ever lived, so it was not difficult for me to take a position.

Because she could speak the "right" language, she was asked to intervene, but now she sees that

> . . . part of that was because they [the black students] felt that I was viewed much too favorably by the administration, so some of their politics was aimed at cutting me down to size as much as confronting the administration, having me fall from the graces of the white structure. I didn't analyze it at the time, I was just too happy to do something I thought was right.

The effect was as expected:

> I was told by the associate librarian, a good friend, that I had been nominated for Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities, but after the confrontation, the administration had a meeting and decided that I was getting to be too much like "Them". So the white structure's way of spanking me was to take that honor away. I was very hurt because, I said, if only my mother knew I had been nominated. I didn't have to get the award--but Momma'd just be delighted to know that I'd been nominated. But I survived, I survived without it.
>
> I experienced a lot of pain when I reflected on that later--the whole process, the dynamic, of being what I call taken out on a limb and left there by the black students, and then having the rug pulled out from under me by the white administration.

Typically, she found recourse in her individual sense of self:

> I wasn't destroyed, you know, I was immersed in learning and being. Being involved in drama, and speech, enjoying all the trips our debating team went on. . . . So I didn't care about what was going on around me. If it were negative, it would be whatever. I just liked experiencing life, like a little kid.

This incident illustrates the hurt and tangle of social realities to which she necessarily belonged, however separate and different she personally felt she could be. It shows the degree to which her language (among other things) played an important role. In fact, in this case she was treated by

others as the person whom her language stood for, though within herself she felt she was acting on independent conscience.

It was only considerably later, in a different milieu, that Marvina came to realizations concerning racism that affected her so personally that for the first time, "I was beginning to question my own existence and my ability to function." She describes "the sophisticated racism that pervaded that community", and, very graphically, her emotional reaction: "it was like my body was jerking to one side and pulled to the other, constantly . . . in constant disequilibrium . . . I was like a drunk person, you know the drunk that never falls, just sort of staggers. . . . That's what was going on." An aspect of her experience was involved with other black people in the community who could not give her support. She felt they were "where I was when I left college. I felt I went back in time with these people . . . their anger, their hostility, and not having worked through that anger and hostility to some other point." One example of the racism she experienced again concerns language, this time with her daughter:

> I was just shocked when I went to the school and they had this little note in my daughter's notebook saying that she had a speech problem. Well I knew what the problem was. The problem was their perception. She had a very decided Southern accent, she had gone to school, her daycare school was predominantly white, and white Southerners have a more pronounced Southern accent,

> drawl, than do black people. She has assimilated that. She'd say "HI-yat" [hat] and "Kay-ut". And . . . granted it bothered me when I was there. I said, "Oh my gosh, I know when we go to visit my mother-in-law, she's going to say, 'Well! our little hillbilly granddaughter!'" And it was going to be more than I could stomach. But I had grown accustomed--she was my daughter, that was the way she talked, and if at all there was any possibility for the mother to transfer her language pattern to her daughter, I was praying! [laughter] and by the time she turned eight, I would have drilled her well. And then she'd come up with this grin on her face--she did it just to aggravate me--and say, "Where's my Hi-yat?" and I'd cringe! [more laughter].

The distinction she makes between the racist implications of the school's identifying her child's speech as defective and her own negative attitude towards Southern speech is perhaps ironical, if very much part of the complexity of the problem for her. Her daughter's language is, after all, her daughter's --on the other hand, it is language that has such associations for her that it makes her "cringe".

In asking Marvina about how she uses both languages, moves in and out of them, under what circumstances, her response is fascinating. Acknowledging the difference between her acquired way of speaking and writing and that used at home--with her grandmother, her sister, her cousins--, she also reveals her consciousness of that difference at the times when she is with them, at the moment of speaking. It is almost as if there is someone else there watching over her shoulder, listening to her, observing the whole situation:

> My enunciation is very important to me, and sometimes I think it's <u>too</u> important because I hear myself talking with my sister sometimes and I don't sound loose enough.

> It's as if I'm over-enunciating, and it's not important to do that with her.

Her language is not only very carefully enunciated--though that is clearly a primary concern for her--but elaborated, more formal:

> . . . sometimes when I talk with her, I talk with her as if this was the written word [italics mine] instead of the spoken word. And she will go in and out of these worlds with me, the language worlds. . . .

If with her sister, it was always possible to try out the new "language world", with her mother, she was careful:

> . . . recently I read some of my old letters and the vocabulary I used in the letters to Momma was different from the one I used with my sister, because my sister would look it up in the dictionary and I guess that some part of me said that Momma would be insulted. So I talked on that level with her. But when I went to college, I wrote a letter to her telling her I was changing, I was in essence growing, developing, and I did not refrain from using my vocabulary . . . I used to love words. . . .

("Like what, for example?")

> Whatever would come . . . I would talk . . . I think sometimes I would elaborate on the definition if I felt that the word was one of those twenty-five cent words. I just had to put it there--not to impress her, but to continue practicing and enlarging my vocabulary.

Her mother was always encouraging, and if she was "insulted" she never showed it. Rather, when Marvina used her new language--"part of me I was becoming"--, her mother would say: "Oh, you've changed . . . that's nice. . . . There's no reason to go to college if you weren't going to change." She would "pave the way if anyone got on my case about using it." This happened whenever she went home:

"Sure as shooting, when I got home, people would want to listen to me, hear my accent, my newly acquired accent, all of those big words I used." Her aunt and her cousins would attack her:

> Everybody stops talking to listen to me, and I get very conscious of my accent. This is how I broke ties with that household. . . . They'd say, "let me hear you talk! We want to hear you talk, you talk so proper! and I would freeze. I would get angry, because to me it was deriding and making fun, and this was a part of me that was supposed to be natural and they weren't letting that flow freely, [italics mine] and so, that would be problematic. And I decided that I was not going to go through that torture. There was no need to endure that, I wasn't going to sit there while they made fun of the way I talk! I loved the way I talk. I have worked on this, and I'm not going to change.

In describing these relatives, Marvina refuses to dismiss their attitude as stemming from ignorance or jealousy. She understands, however, that for them, "that change of language symbolizes a move from black, from poor black, to the uppity blacks who are very much like white folks." Her aunt had always accused her mother of raising the children the wrong way, spoiling them: "My aunt used to refer to us as 'those kids that Lottie Mae thinks that they're white'".

But the situation is very different when it comes to her relationship with her grandmother, as she describes poignantly:

> Sometimes I make a point, when I feel that people are just sort of entranced by my conversation at home. My grandmother told me she loves to hear me talk, and I don't want to intimidate her, and I try very hard not to enunciate, not to be as conscious of my enunciation.

> Because I want to be comfortable, and I want her to be comfortable with me.

She goes on:

> Sometimes she'll say, "Gal, I sho' like to hear you talk!" and immediately I say to myself, oh Marvina, I know it's good that she likes it, but it's like you're talking at her, and I don't want to talk at her at that time. I don't want her to listen to me lecture, I want her to be part of me. So . . . I will still enunciate, but I just try to bring myself down, down. . . . I say, hey, don't worry about the form but the content, put the structure away. If it happens, it happens, but make sure you're not conscious of it and get into where Big Momma is. She's one of the most important people in your life.

The quote reflects her consciousness of the importance of language levels, a consciousness there even at the moment of speaking with her grandmother. Partly she is aware of the sociological problem--that her grandmother perceives her generally "on a pedestal", a distance that she longs to alter. But through the words she uses here, she reveals that she herself feels the difference between them in terms of "high" and "low" levels: "I just try to bring myself down, down . . . ", suggesting the extent to which, if perhaps, unconsciously, she has embraced the deficit value put on the vernacular. For who is it, in the "I" that observes herself 'enunciating", who says, "Hey, don't worry about the form but the content; put the structure away"? In some ways, her words to herself at the time suggest that her strong identification of who she is with the language she speaks results in a hyper-consciousness of language itself, a seeming separation

of language forms from meaning and feeling levels. The language she so identifies as her own is also a barrier to important relationships, cutting her off in fundamental ways from her past.

When Marvina read what I had written here, she told me that the question of "levels" gave her considerable pain:

> It is something that I know is true but that I would rather deny. Having come to terms with my black identity, nevertheless, I have been so Europeanized that no matter how positive I feel about my upbringing, part of that "deficit mentality" is still with me. But I recognize also that the language I have is more than a way to "get material goods"; it gives me a sense of control over my destiny; it is my way to confront the system. And if I can capitalize on my language to exalt the status of blacks who don't have it, I will.

In writing about black speech, Geneva Smitherman has given the name "linguistic push-pull" to the place blacks find themselves in this society: "the push toward Americanization of Black English counterbalanced by the pull of its Africanization (Smitherman, 1977). Both linguistic forms have been necessary for black survival in white America. . . . " An aspect of "double-consciousness", the linguistic push-pull results in an "ambivalence about a dimension of blackness so close to personal identity" that is in some ways unresolvable.[13]

Problems of Non-Identification

Rebeca: ". . . in their language it's hard, it keeps backing you up." If Marvina so closely identifies her self with the language she learned, Rebeca as fully rejects English

as "her own". Marvina's mastery of the forms of standard English has given her certain means to express her identity, to "control her destiny" in the society that otherwise discriminates against her. Rebeca, instead, finds that the language creates a barrier to her communication of thought and feeling in the social world where she moves professionally. In some ways the way she speaks is an additional obstacle to social viability where she is already judged negatively as Hispanic and black. Always conscious of translating, she is frustrated by the gap between her inner thoughts, knowledge, and feelings and the means she has to communicate these with.

She speaks of self-consciousness in a way that makes graphic the process of developing a thought, to finding the words, and then to translating. "I get butterflies in my stomach," she says, and explains,

> I think it's because you're so conscious of what you are actually doing. It's the process that goes on in your mind, to get the words out, that makes you uncomfortable--I'm talking for myself. I have to take time to process all that thinking, to put my thoughts together and then get it out in words. That makes me feel anxious, more than it would if I were talking my own native language. You have to find what you want to say, figure how to put that in words, your feelings--it's very hard.

She describes lying awake at night "rehearsing in my mind what I want to say" the next day, and "when the situation arises, I don't say anything of what I have planned!" I share with her my own anxiety as a native speaker in that kind of situation and ask whether it wouldn't be true if it

were all to be in Spanish. She says, yes, probably, but the language difference makes a great deal of difference. She gives an example:

> Right now I'm taking this course. I thought I was going to be part of the class and what happened? The whole thing turned around, so I have to do a workshop for the class! The topic of my workshop is my area--which is communication--but even though I consider myself knowing a lot about it and how to communicate with other people, I find it really difficult because I have the language problem. They are all Anglo, English-speaking people, and their vocabulary is larger than mine and I find I don't know what to do.

I ask her about "vocabulary larger than mine";

> I feel so conscious that I'm not at their level, that I'm not using the words that they're expecting me to use. Sometimes your understanding doesn't have anything to do with it. A lot of people use words that they don't know what they're saying--I feel that's stupid, using a word that I don't know the meaning of. And what happens is I say a word and they ask me what that means, to repeat the same thing in different words, and I feel trapped because I don't know how to do it.

With a limited repertoire of words, then, one is in a sense "trapped". But it is also, as she says, a matter of level:

> It's not because you don't know the topic; it's just that you have to find appropriate words depending on the level of other people. I think that's one of the things that really bothers a person whose native language is not English when they're talking to a group of people that are English-speaking. Even when you know you are at the same level intellectually, but in your own language--in <u>their</u> language, it's hard, it keeps backing you up.

By "level", she means appropriateness. Much as Nzamba (only from the other end, as it were) speaks of his inability to handle English except in formal situations, Rebeca clearly feels best speaking the colloquial language she learned:

> . . . it's not that I know Spanish and you know English, because also you have to check at what level you're at, what kind of language you use. O.K., everything is different; it's English. But what kind of English do you know? You have to know the language--what level of language you're going to use--like to somebody who has never been to school, or with teenagers; there are different levels. The language I use in the classroom is not the same kind of language that I'd be using somewhere else.

Rebeca's consciousness of social levels also affects her use of the language. At one point we are discussing how angry she gets when in a classroom the subject matter is the problem of the minority poor in this country:

> You see, people here don't understand. They say that it's just because the immigrants from Puerto Rico are lazy. I'm not saying just Americans, because you know a lot of Puerto Ricans with so-called higher education don't understand either . . . people that transfer from the University of Puerto Rico to finish graduate work here. They haven't gone through all this bitterness we have gone through, so they don't understand why people are living on welfare, why people are collect food stamps, dealing with drugs, they just don't understand it.

Usually, the professor turns to her as an authority for her views. "I don't know why he does that--I guess he knows because of the way I speak." But her response is not to discuss it:

> I get mad. Sometimes I just slam my books on the table and leave. You know . . . if you don't know what you're talking about, don't talk. Keep your mouth shut if you're going to say something you don't know about. I get up and leave, or else I would get into an argument and I would start crying.

Her reaction reflects her repudiation of the ways that the academic approach intellectualizes what to her are painful

realities--and in the process, she feels, distorting them. It also reveals her sense of class difference in this case and, surely, her frustration at being unable to express her feelings in the language.

But for Rebeca, there is no confusion concerning "who she is" and certainly no identification for her with the English she uses. In spite of the fact that the problems she has with the language sometimes prevent her from communicating, she nevertheless has little difficulty with her sense of personal identity:

> It is very important to know and to keep your own identity. Because of my color, I say I can identify with blacks, or because of my accent with Hispanics, but your true identity is the one that is within you. I'm talking in terms of culture, social class and all the rest. Don't deny what you are: the most important thing is to be yourself.

Anya: "It killed your creativity; if you had ideas, you couldn't express them." Like Rebeca, Anya has no doubt that English is not "her own". It is only in the past year, living in this country where she must use it constantly that she is sometimes aware that she is not translating from her own language. The fact that our interviews focused intensively on her experience as a schoolchild forced to speak the language reflects her feelings today of estrangement from it, as well as her regret that at the time she was not "mature enough to realize" that she would have done well not to reject learning the language.

As has already been discussed at some length in Chapter One, Anya's experience of alienation from the language was closely connected to factors of social class difference and political attitudes brought from home. That in some ways the national culture (the religion, some courses acknowledged the cultural tradition) was included in the school curriculum also helped to undercut identification with the otherwise British ideology.

Underlying Anya's sense of the "agony" of those years was the frustration she felt as a very bright and naturally talkative child being unable to develop her thoughts and express her feelings. Because English was strictly imposed, she was reduced to silence, both by her inability to understand, at first, and by being unable to find the words in the new language to express her ideas. Such repression she feels "blocked my creativity". At home, by contrast, she had always been encouraged to share in lively discussions, a difference in expected modes of communication that created additional problems for her at school.

In the course of time, in school, Anya found a very good friend--an English-speaking girl from the upper class--who helped her to fit into the school milieu, helped her with her work, and with her English. Eventually, she tells me, Anya became very popular in her class and did exceptionally well in her schoolwork. Nevertheless, she never

lost her sense of difference and her identification with her roots, as well as the nationalist and populist ideology that had so influenced her in her early years.

Phyl: "It stifled a little bit the me in me". In the preceding chapter, Phyl describes her sense of how deeply Western culture had penetrated her own, and how personally her education had alienated her from her cultural roots. An example she gives, as a demonstration of this, is the difficulty she has today in communicating in the vernacular, so permeated are her thoughts by Western forms of logic: "I wrote the letter in the dialect, but it was not flowing in the dialect. . . . They were Western thoughts, they were also Western structure. . . . " That she dreams in English is to her the final blow: "Your dreams are your own; therefore they should be in your own language."

It is only recently that Phyl has come to a recognition of the degree to which her experience was repressive, and to an understanding of her own identity as something indeed "her own" to be expressed, separate from, if intertwined with the shaping effects of both her Asian "roots" and her Western acculturation.

She says of her education that it was "miseducation" in that it cut her off from her roots, and of its discipline as "very useful," but that it "stifled somehow a little of the oriental in me, the me in me, the emotional part."

Speaking thus dualistically of herself, she pits rationality against emotion, equating the one with the West, the other with the Asian:

> In my thoughts, when it gets to concepts, and even some of the images, the most rational part of me is the Western. I will be speaking in Western categories, I will analyze . . . if you remember when I spoke at the Retreat at the end of the seminar I was very Western when I spoke and said, "You people spend so much money and yet you do not take the time to evaluate". . . . There I was, making points: 1,2,3.
>
> . . . It was a terrible situation, with all those quarrels. And I think that I want to say exactly how I feel, sometimes I would say to myself, "I know as an oriental, I know how I feel" and I just keep quiet, keep my feelings to myself. I am most oriental in this sense; although I am very sensitive, I could feel I know I am hurt, but I'm not in for confrontation.

Of the emotional side of her nature, which she feels to be the "oriental in me", she says,

> I have still to learn how to get angry, in a way. First, I'm afraid I will shout. Physical violence I think I'd be very capable of. That's why I never carry knives, because I'm afraid. In that part of the country where I come from people are known for being short, hot-tempered, and we also manufacture a special kind of knife--we are known by its name. I'm afraid of, I know I can be physically violent, and experientially I know I can be verbally violent and really can hurt.

The emotional side of her nature, she says, is in fact dangerous--so much so that much control must be exercised. "A person of my culture," she says, "will hold it in until they explode." In her culture, expression of feeling is discouraged,as is assertion of self:

> In my culture, identity is not given so much emphasis as in this culture, so for us, the difficulty is even to establish your identity . . . we are so group centered. There is not so often the nuclear family unit--it's an

> extended family, and these are big families, so if you're to survive, you have to do a little bit more conformity, plus all the values that are emphasized in families; the family unit is head. Then when you go out of the family, you also join groups.
>
> For us to think of self is not to think of "me alone", but is also to think of all the others that have helped me become what I am. Our saying is, "He who does not look at his roots will never reach his destiny". It's part of our language: "He who won't look back, cannot go forward, cannot reach where he is going."

In her schooling, which she loved throughout, she found ways of developing identity through her achievement as a student. Particularly she remembers with pleasure a teacher who encouraged a group of students to independently pursue philosophy: they called themselves "The Seekers of Wisdom". Her intellectual self, the "rational, Western side", was gratified, if at the same time, this meant cutting herself off from pride in or knowledge about her own culture. When she became a nun, after college, her training was, she sees, a continuation in some ways of her secular education, promoting a Western/Christian orientation that gave little respect for Asian culture. As a teacher she found herself rebuked for asserting original ways of teaching, or for protesting the irrelevance of the form of education to the people in the rural areas she was asked to work with: her questions were an abrogation of humility and obedience. It was only later that she began her "liberation". She says that "if it were not for a friend of mine, a woman who introduced me to the whole thing of group dynamics, to training in sensitivity,

I would be like some of those old nuns. You know: 'This is the only world, the only thing, the only reality.'" Phyl's description of the work she did with this woman reflects quite graphically the kind of "birth" she feels occurred as she discovered that she had feelings long smothered:

> Sometimes she would question herself, later she told me, "I was getting afraid because I was opening up something completely new to you, and I know that you are not able to get all of it, . . ." She perceived that I was in a narrow space, but she also saw that I am alive and I am spontaneous, and yet that thing couldn't come out. I had much difficulty, being exposed to all this sensitivity, so she said, "take a rest", then she would invite me again and I would go.

Soon she was helping her friend in facilitating these sensitivity training groups. For the first time, with the encouragement of this woman, she learned to express her feelings without fear and to understand the possibilities of education as a dialogical process--one foreign both to her own culture ("We are not a dialogical culture; we tend to be silent") and to traditional Western education. The idea of "dialogue" for her is based on the ability and willingness to listen so as to respect the unique identity of the other:

> More and more I feel that education is for me, more drawing out the best in a person, or whatever. Just draw out so it comes to the surface, because when things have surfaced then you can look at it. The other person has a lot to say, and maybe this is the only chance he has to say it . . . .
>
> This is what I stand for in my small group work. I am giving this member a chance to respond with her identity. . . . If I let you have two or three minutes, then the strongest person in the group won't be able to brainwash you.

> . . . for me, it is out of a sense of my own conviction that I have my own uniqueness. This is the only thing that gives me strength. To allow my own and to allow the uniqueness of the other one and allow her to speak.

Even with this brief summary of Phyl's very complex discussion of her identity, it must be clear that many factors other than her education contributed to the repression of feeling and the difficulty with which she struggled to a sense of her self. But certainly the combined effects of learning English from the very beginning of schooling, and learning in a context that exluded knowledge about or connection with her cultural roots contributed to that repression, as well as to her sense of being in some ways divided. That she equates her education with rationality, her roots with emotion, and calls the latter "the me in me" suggests that in some ways she feels her "Western self" to be inauthentic, invading even the level of the unconscious ("your dreams are your own; therefore they should be in your own language.").

Nzamba: "I have missed the living aspect of my learning". If Phyl more than once in our interviews speaks of the sense she has of "views of reality" and feels that the world of the farmers with whom she works today is "more real" than her own, Nzamba is clear about the distinction:

> I lived in two worlds: the real one, Nzamba, and the mythical one, that was John's. Yet every time I went back to the world of my father, I felt it to be so real, but there were those conflicting forces: "Your real

> world," said the mythical world, "is primitive." I mimicked and imitated things I didn't understand. . . . The world I hated--African, real--because of the mythical world. I rejected the image the mythical world gave me to reject.

In Chapter Four I have quite fully presented Nzamba's experience as he perceives it today. The degree to which he feels that his identity has been threatened by the strength of the "myth" comes through in the frequent reference he makes to falseness--using words such as "mimicking, aping, pretending" to describe persons who succumbed, naming missionaries as "stooges" and African functionaries as "puppets". That he personally escaped--"I am not an Afro-Saxon; I am not a Black European"--he attributes to maturity and to the fact of his coming to the United States where the realities came clear, and where through his own study and his activity as a teacher about his own culture, he has found certain psychological resolution.

Nevertheless, it is a resolution in ambivalence and is accompanied with a sense of loss. In the previous chapter, he describes the extent to which he attributes this loss to the thoroughness with which he came to think in the Western frame and the impossibility he feels for himself to therefore <u>understand</u> African thought, let alone express himself in a way understandable to his people.

> I'm sure there's a lot to do with the African psychology and the European psychology. But mine is all European, and unless I'm able to fit within the psychological

> framework of African interpretation, I'll never understand. And since I missed it, these are the kinds of things that you just cannot understand intellectually. You have to live them. Do you see what I'm saying? And I've missed the living aspect of my learning.

Ruth: "I think it's the fear of being misunderstood". Ruth shares with Nzamba the awareness that the education they received can lead to the kind of alienation exhibited by many around them, people who "try so hard to fit to the point where they make themselves ridiculous". She says simply, "I have no idea why some people act that way--you wonder where is the real person at the time." When I ask her how she sees herself, her response is:

> It depends on who is looking at me. Maybe I am like them. I tell myself I am aware of the pressure of just being in the situation among people who do things in only one way. Always there is the temptation to fall into the group. I look at myself--I like to be myself as much as I can. It's true I can very beautifully blend into a situation where I am required, but I can't keep it up, because it's not me.

We have seen in earlier chapters how for a variety of reasons Ruth feels some lack of confidence either in speaking or writing English. The fact that the language was enforced in the school, instilling fear and unwillingness to use it, the emphasis in the school and in the society on the necessity to sound like an English person when speaking it, inhibited the desire to try it out at all.

But with Ruth today her concern and occasional anxiety when using English is less with the fear of ridicule

for making mistakes--as it was when she was young--than with the "fear of being misunderstood". It is while we are discussing her ability with the language that she makes the direct connection between language and expression of self, the desire to be authentic: "You see, I think the biggest adjustment, the biggest demand on anybody who is educated in my country is to be able to fit in both worlds . . . without changing your personality structure. To be yourself and fit when you are placed in such a situation, to fit in others, without being artificial about it."

Summary

There is considerable risk to identity for the child socialized into a new culture other than her first, and through a language different from that with which earliest relationships and meanings were established. Although identity is endlessly complex and changing, there are factors involved in the language and schooling experience that may make a difference in the outcome: whether the new language becomes integral to one's sense of personal identity and serves as an authentic means for expression and development of thought.

The following are among some of the problems raised in this chapter: 1) The perpetuation of the social connotations of the school language as intrinsically more valuable than or superior to one's original language may lead to the

learner's rejection of the original and separation from early sources of feeling and relationship. 2) The imposition of the new language as the only means for self-expression and communication may result in frustration and block of creativity, and where there is no positive identification with the new culture, there may be a rejection of the language itself and an unwillingness to make it one's own. 3) The overemphasis on "correct" forms of speaking the language accompanied with threat of punishment can lead to fear of using the language at all and to ultimate lack of self-confidence in self-expression. 4) The exclusion of the learner's experiential world may lead to a sense of betrayal and loss, a sense of falseness and lack of connection with the "real". 5) Overemphasis on the logical and the rational, along with the discouragement of the expression of feeling, may result in a sense of dualism and repression of self.

In the following chapter, these problems will be further explored in light of what teachers contribute to them, as well as what measures may be taken to alleviate them.

FOOTNOTES

[1]James Baldwin, "Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare," quoted in Ali A. Mazrui, The Political Sociology of the English Language (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975), p. 78.

[2]Dell Hymes, Introduction to Functions of Language in the Classroom, eds. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, and Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), p. xlii.

[3]Okot P'Bitek, A Lament: Song of Lawino (Nairobi: East African Institute Press, 1966), p. 200.

[4]Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 243.

[5]Charles Dickens, Hard Times (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911).

[6]Ina Selden, "Padre Padrone Written as a Duty," New York Times, June 8, 1977, p. C22.

[7]Richard Rodriquez, "The Achievement of Desire," College English 40 (November, 1978): 240.

[8]Ibid., p. 241.

[9]Ibid., p. 250.

[10]Ibid., p. 254.

[11]Ibid., p. 251.

[12]While much ahs been written of course on this subject, a particular diatribe can be found in Jules Henry, "Golden Rule Days: American Schoolrooms," Culture Against Man (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 283-321. On alienation and the "centerless character" produced by the school system, see also Michael Maccoby, "A Psychoanalytic View of Learning," in Emerging Educational Issues eds. Julius Meanacker and Erwin Pollack (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), pp. 81-90.

[13]Geneva Smitherman, "What Go Round Come Round: King in Perspective," Harvard Educational Review 51 (February 1981): 82.

CHAPTER VI

SIGNIFICANCE FOR EDUCATORS

Introduction

This study has looked at the problems that arise in language learning for persons whose first language and cultural background are other than the prestige or dominant language/culture in their societies. In unequal societies, acquisition of skills in the prestige language is prerequisite to entering into the life and gaining the benefits of the dominant culture. However, we have seen how many factors both outside and inside the school will affect the acquisition of the new language. Motivation to learn is influenced by the perceptions of the prestige culture held by those outside it and of the promise held out by education as dominated by that culture. Individual motivation is influenced too by parental relationships and by unique personality characteristics above and beyond givens such as "native intelligence" or linguistic aptitude.

Where schooling is concerned, clearly the meeting of divergent cultures is problematic for the individual. Furthermore, the nature of skills acquired is up to question. Success in the school's terms is not necessarily equivalent to mastery, and is often bought at a price, for adaptation

to school norms and standards may require abandonment or repression of one's own, a process that can seriously affect identity.

Thus far, the study has looked at these issues from the perspective of the learners themselves, in an attempt to right an imbalance of view and in hopes of underscoring the complexity of the issue rather than focusing on one aspect to the exclusion of the rest. One conclusion can quickly be drawn: that factors influencing the experience are interconnected, multiple, and in their particular combinations, unique. In spite of the great variety in experiences represented by the people I interviewed, what they all share is the fact that in acquiring the new language and achieving considerable success by the standards of the prestige culture, their schooling in many ways denied them their first culture and language. The effect of this on their mastery of English and on their sense of autonomy in relation to either culture and to themselves is problematic.

The Teachers Perspective

In this chapter I would like to shift focus a bit to look at what educators bring to the learning situation as well as to suggest means by which they can contribute through a better understanding of the learners' perceptions and a resolution of some of the problems that occur where

such understanding is lacking. Obviously, what has been implied all along in this study has been the assumption that for many reasons educators may be insufficiently attentive to the complexities of the experience for the learners, and that it is essential for teachers to consider these factors--those they can do something about and those they cannot--when addressing the prospect of "imparting skills". While much to be said here applies to good teaching generally, certain aspects are specific to the cross-cultural situation. Teachers are integral to the learning situation, and it is important to recognize that what they bring to the situation is equally complex. Their own motivation is governed by societal factors they may not be conscious of; the clash of cultures their students/learners experience is one that they share; and the methods, materials, the language itself that they are using are full of meaning to be consciously recognized.

Objectives of the educational system. Recognition of the overall objectives that control the educational institution/organization is sometimes difficult to come by, and teacher involvement in questioning, modifying, accepting or challenging these, equally difficult at times. However, any educator should consider these and examine the extent to which he/she shares in them.

One dimension of the study has been the purposes and assumptions that govern a given educational system and its effects on the learning process, as well as on identity for the learners. Several of the people interviewed specifically attacked the political intentions of colonial education and their own schooling as extensions of dominance: education for passivity, education for control. Today those countries are independent and--in the case of some Asian countries, for instance--follow educational policies that promote nationalism as well as learning in the national language. In Anya's country, for example, English is no longer permitted except as a single subject of study in all schools. Nevertheless, my friends agree that in many respects things have not changed: hierarchical colonial attitudes prevail, especially among those who control education, themselves being products of earlier days; often, too, significant changes in materials and methods have not been made. Thus essentially the same problems outlined by those interviewed from colonial countries remain.

Until fairly recently, the public school system in the United States operated, at least ideologically, under the "melting pot theory," designating as its major objective the assimilation of culturally diverse groups into mainstream America.

One effect of such a policy on teaching of language

to non-English speakers was to deny native language use in the learning context for these children, sometimes with devastating effect.* The past decade or so has seen some constructive effort at reinterpreting the objectives of education towards the affirmation of cultural pluralism for social equality. However, specific programs and approaches towards this end are still under attack and the old attitudes largely prevail.**

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*W. Walker notes: "It seems clear that the startling decline during the past sixty years of both English and Cherokee literacy in the Cherokee tribe is chiefly a result of the recent scarcity of reading materials in Cherokee and of the fact that learning to read has become associated with coercive instruction, particularly in the context of an alien and threatening school. . . . For the Cherokee community to become literate once again, Cherokees must be convinced that literacy does not imply the death of their society, that education is not a clever device to wean children away from the tribe. This is not a uniquely Cherokee situation. Identical attitudes toward education and the school no doubt can be found in Appalachia, in urban slums, in Afro-Asia, and indeed, in all societies where the recruitment of individuals into the dominant society threatens the extinction of a functioning group."[1]

**In the now famous "Ann Arbor" case (1979), teachers of the King School maintained that they saw all their students as "equal" and that they "treated them equally". By refusing to acknowledge linguistic and cultural difference in the black children (plaintiffs in the case), although elsewhere treating them as deficient in capacity to learn reading and writing skills, they were found guilty of denying the children equal education opportunity.

Geneva Smitherman points out that in focusing the issue on language alone, the judge avoided bringing to court consideration of the racial and economic implications of linquistic discrimination; she deplores the refusal of the self-proclaimed liberal and enlightened Michigan community to acknowledge such realities.[2]

Teacher backgrounds. It certainly makes a difference whether an educator is from the same or different language/cultural background as the learner, but the issue is not simple. A common criticism against the mandate for bilingual education in this country, for example, is that there are not enough trained bilingual teachers to provide the service. The response often heard is that it matters far more that the teacher share the background and language of the students than have the kind of training provided in teacher certification programs.

Common sense would argue that teachers from the same cultural background will be more likely to relate to the learner's experience: to value, rather than denigrate, that language and experience, and to serve perhaps as a model with which to identify and to emulate. Their knowledge of and ability to relate to the learners' language world, to help them make the transition to the other, may be invaluable.* However, as this study helps to point out, those teachers who have themselves been through the kind of formal education described by the people interviewed may well carry attitudes that have the opposite effect. Both Nzamba and Phyl, for example, mention that if it hadn't been for other circumstances later in their lives that altered

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*Dell Hymes tells of a black teacher who very effectively taught children by using the cadences and rhythms characteristic of the black church. He was criticized for being "illogical"![3]

their perceptions, they would have been like the teachers they had: for Phyl, ". . . like those old nuns with only one view on reality"; for Nzamba, "They were black, but inside they were very white." Feelings about the superiority/inferiority of the prestige language inculcated through their own learning may well be accompanied by a rejection of the language they grew up speaking--and these feelings will be conveyed to the learner. Feelings of guilt at abandoning one's own culture--a possible psychological outcome of the experience--may result in holding negative attitudes towards the learners who are still "in it", however unconsciously these attitudes are held.*

On the other hand, as this study shows, teachers from the prestige culture may well be oblivious to the culture of the child, if not outright derogatory. One can imagine how differently Anya might have responded to the learning of English in her school had her teachers not been "so arrogant", had they better understood the particular

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*An ethnographic study by Robert V. Dumont explored these dimensions in a comparison of two classes in a Native American school in Arizona. Dumont shows how the Cherokee teacher was far less effective than the white teacher. The former had been so socialized into Anglo values and styles that he was alienated from the children and unable to relate; the other had great sensitivity and understanding of the children's culture and was thus able to help them make the kind of transition they needed to eventually adapt to the Anglo schools they would have later to be going to.[4]

difficulties for a child of the lower class with little money and no English. Rather than "catering to the outstanding students", they might have helped her instead to adjust to the new, so that negative influences from home might have been considerably mitigated. A further consideration is hypothetical--if logical--that a monolingual person often can only see "one world", circumscribed as his vision is by the only language he knows.

There is no resolution to the issue of teacher background. Rather the point is that it is important for all teachers, regardless of background, to be aware of their own assumptions about the learners, to recognize all there is to learn about them, and to be conscious of their own values and objectives. These factors will influence what goes on in the interaction with learners, and so, the learning process itself.

Assumptions about learning and learners. I have recently heard the same national literacy campaign described by two different educators as, on the one hand, "a mobilization scheme" and, on the other, "a process of social creation." Were these two to be actively involved in such a campaign--as teachers, as trainers, as evaluators, etc.--how differently would they approach their work, and how clearly would their attitudes affect the ways they interact with learners, use materials, interpret effects. Underlying their fundamental

approach to the task is a conscious or unconscious assumption concerning the learners themselves which would affect in turn the ways that the learners will see themselves and the purposes of their learning. Also reflected in their two descriptions may be seen to be an assumption concerning the nature and potential of language education.

It is probably not necessary here to reiterate the well known truth that a teacher's expectations of the learner's ability will be self-fulfilling. Perhaps more subtle and complex are the implications for learning of behaviorist or constructivist interpretations of what people are and how they learn. Theodore Brameld outlines the dimensions of the ongoing dispute, broadly seeing the one as "deterministic" and the other as "activistic":

> In the former approach, learning to accept and adjust to the culture is the primary emphasis; it tends to be deterministic. In the latter, learning to carry on "transactions" with the culture so as to produce changes both in it and in those who are thereby learning is the primary emphasis; it tends to be activistic.

By contrast to the behaviorist assumption, the other assumes learning to be "a total organic process involving participation on the part of the learners who not only respond to but help in selecting stimuli and interacting with them so as to reshape as well as to be shaped by the cultural environment."[5] The way a teacher views the learner--as a person that responds to external stimuli and so changes behavior, or as a person that interacts with such stimuli, at the same time interposing

his own interpretations and needs--will obviously influence the way he/she will go about the language teaching task.

The traditional approach to teaching that characterizes the experience of those interviewed in the study can be seen to be "deterministic" or behaviorist in assumption. Thus the people interviewed report that such methods (rote learning, memorization, lecture, etc.) encouraged obedience, conformity, a kind of passivity in the face of learning, and discouraged questioning, active dialogue, or experimentation--qualities characteristic of participatory or "activistic" learning. For most of them, this was quite consistent with authoritarian upbringing, and thus presented few problems of social adjustment. Certainly, judging by the success with which they accomplished tasks set out by their schooling, there was effectiveness of a sort. Regarding conflict concerning identity, however, as well as achievement of mastery in the new language, the picture is different.

Language teaching objectives. There are two broadly different attitudes about the purposes of language and literacy education that reflect the deterministic and activistic theories of learning and complement what earlier we have called "instrumental" and "integrative" motivational bases on the part of learners. The one is pragmatic and utilitarian: language and literacy are skills to be learned towards the end of enhancing function in a world that requires them; without these,

one is lost. The other may be described as humanistic to the extent that it sees the interconnection of language with social and psychological identity and its potential for effecting cognitive and psychological change. While either view may or may not involve certain kinds of manipulation, the point is that each will lead to a different kind of result. This study argues that both skills and psychosocial aspects of language must be attended to if mastery is our objective.

Perhaps because of its strictly pragmatic aims, the "skills approach" to language/literacy teaching often carries with it a pretense to objectivity, as though language were solely a system of sounds, syntax and word referents that one can put on or take off at will like a coat. The assumption that language is value-free and neutral ignores the fact that instead language is always the reflection of values, as well as an accumulation of meanings determined by one way of looking at and structuring experience. Not only are all learners (like all teachers) equipped with their own, but the new language they are learning is equally rich in interpretation and judgment, and has its particular logic of organization. We have seen that ignoring the realities of the learner's language world in this sense has resulted in a sense of loss and inauthenticity for some; in a kind of learning of the new

language which some characterize as imitative rather than genuine; in a lack of confidence in expressing oneself in multiple situations in the new language; and, at the extreme in some cases, in an inability to any longer think or communicate in one's first language with spontaneity--without translation and self-consciousness. Two of the persons interviewed directly attribute their unwillingness to learn the language at all to the methods, as well as the attitudes within the schooling environment, that ignored their realities.

Thus it seems that the skills-only focus on language education falls short of the mark in fundamental ways. Even where one's objectives are primarily pragmatic--helping people to enter into the socio-economic life of the prestige culture through transmitting of the language--it is questionable whether such skills as may be learned in this way are in fact sufficient for more than "coping" in the other language (apart from whether such persons will be accepted for other reasons). Where we are equally concerned with the psychological effects, as well as with cultural viability, it can be seen that much more must be considered by the educator in helping learners to acquire the language.

It is generally asserted by those concerned with thought development and learning generally that educators must "start where the learner is" and seek means to engage learners actively in their learning, building on the

perceptions and experiences they bring with them to the learning situation, rather than ignoring these. If this is generally true for all learning, it is particularly true for language learning in the cross-cultural context as represented in this study. For, as we have seen, while social realities cannot be changed in the classroom, inequalities need not be perpetrated there, and the affirmation of one's own language and culture, like the affirmation of one's self-worth, is the most solid psychological ground for promoting learning.

Problems and Recommendations

While it is certainly imperative for a language educator to inform herself as much as possible concerning the language(s) and culture(s) of the learners, there is a direct way by which she can come to learn--as well as to learn about her own attitudes and culture--that is to teach the language in such a way that the learner's language and perceptions are allowed to be expressed. As must be clear by now, it is exactly this connection of the material to be taught with the experience of the learner that will help to counteract conflicts that may arise in cross-cultural situations and will at the same time help the learner towards the mastery of the language.

What follows then are comments and suggestions

concerning approaches to language education that most broadly concern cultural and psychological affirmation as in fact the most pragmatic means for helping learners to make the new language their own, or master it. These suggestions will be offered within the context of particular problems that have been raised variously in the study--problems which in some cases seem directly connected to some common misconceptions concerning language itself, such things as may be overlooked by the unwitting educator.

Social connotations. Far from carrying objective value, languages in unequal societies are always heavily invested with social connotations that apply to the status and acceptability of the groups that speak them. Languages come to be seen as intrinsically "better" or "worse". The language of the prestige class takes on the value of being superior; the vernacular or non-standard varieties are viewed not as simply different, but deficient. Such attitudes are all too often communicated in the language learning situation, promoting the value-laden assumption that one is how one speaks. Hymes comments, "If one rejects a child's speech, one probably communicates rejection of the child."[6]

The motivation to learn English exactly because of the prestige it carries influenced most of the people interviewed if in different ways. For instance, it influenced

Anya negatively. Marvina came early to the feeling that standard English was good English, in and of itself. The emphasis on the intrinsic superiority of the one language over the other also resulted in feelings of anxiety about expressing oneself "badly" in the new language, in an over-consciousness of the superficial aspects of the language at the expense of free communication, and in developed negative attitudes towards the first language--by implication, towards that part of one's self that uses it, and towards others who do.

Ignoring the value-laden connotations of language may be as destructive as actively promoting them. Social meanings run deep--both in the teacher as well as the learner--, and they should be consciously explored. If a teacher cannot change social realities, she can do much to correct language attitudes in the learning situation by asserting the truth that all languages are equally serviceable* and where

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*Einar Haugen states, "Let us recall that although a language is a tool and an instrument of communcation, this is not all it is. A language is also part of one's personality, a form of behavior that has its roots in our earliest experience. Whether it is a so-called rural or ghetto dialect, or a peasant language, or a "primitive" idiom, it fulfills exactly the same needs and performs the same services in the daily lives of its speakers as does the most advanced language of culture. Every language, dialect, patois, or lingo is a structurally complete framework into which can be poured any subtlety of emotion or thought that its users are capable of experiencing. Whatever it lacks at any given time or place in the way of vocabulary and syntax can be supplied in very short order by borrowing and imitation from other languages. Any scorn for the language of others is scorn for those who use it, and as such is a form of social discrimination."[7]

appropriate exploring with the learners the differences between that being taught and that which they own.

Language transfer and code-switching. Though equally serviceable within one context, languages are not equally sufficient to express cross-cultural experience. Thus both Anya and Ruth talk about the many occasions they find where they "code-switch" between English and their own language, finding neither language always sufficient to what they need to express at the moment. Not all languages are uniformly transferrable; not all meanings can be translated into another language or vice versa. A good example, which seems extreme if it weren't so common, is given by Nzamba where he tells of learning elementary mathematics where missionary translation of British texts into the ethnic language had him learning "2 birches + 2 oaks = 4 trees."* If such relatively concrete concepts were totally strange, requiring what Nzamba calls an effort of "double abstraction", it is easy to see that more abstract concepts relating to felt experience in one culture may well be "untranslatable" in another.

This suggests that in a learning situation where

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*Thus, "Onward Christian Soldiers," translated by the missionaries into Kiswahili, while carrying the message intended, nevertheless was distorted by the necessities of that language: "Let us go the soldiers of Jesus Christ/Follow us very carefully/ So as to arrive at God./ Our enemies are the ones who are smart and dangerous./ Let us all walk together hand in hand/ All of us like soldiers." (Nzamba's re-translation.)

the learner's own language is forbidden, thought which is related to personal experience may be discouraged, and imitation of form the only recourse. Hymes remarks on the positive effects where "code-switching" is permitted, and on the significance of its occurrence where it spontaneously occurs:

> Members of minority groups (who generally have some command of the dominant variety as well as of their own vernacular) may be equally sensitive to the relationship among language, social meaning and context--a sensitivity that can be in some respects a very desirable outcome of experience with language, and must be taken very carefully into account in language programs. Indeed, whereas a teacher might regard use of other than the standard variety as deleterious, the extent of code-switching in her classroom may be a measure of her success in creating an environment of personal involvement and mutual trust in the use of language! To develop a creative and elaborated use of language requires building on situations containing the very phenomena some would think must first be stamped out.[8]

Words and hidden meanings. Aside from the broad assumption of "onlyone reality" implied in the kind of contextual unilateralism described above, a related issue is hidden meaning--most hidden, probably, from the native speaker of the language being taught. Inherent in the English language itself, for example, are buried assumptions and values that may be destructive to the very values of equality one is trying to promote. Ali A. Mazrui writes at length about the necessity for "deracializing" the English language, discussing the ways that connotations of the words "white" and "black" and their correlatives contribute to negative

self-image for blacks and to feelings of superiority for whites. Conscious awareness of the hidden meanings that may perpetrate negative attitudes is a first step in altering rather than promoting such attitudes. As Mazrui points out, "it is arguable that unconscious self-denigration is even more alarming than purposeful self-devaluation."[9] Nzamba and Rebeca were two, among those interviewed, particularly conscious of the language at this level; Nzamba insisted that I recognize his meaning when, once, he said that there was a "white-out" in the schools on all news of the civil war. He is careful to repudiate terms such as "pagan", "primitive" and "tribe" as being derogatory. Similarly, Rebeca, when identifying herself as the "black sheep" in her family, immediately explains the term: "the strongest one."

Immersion: imposition or enrichment. The problems involved where the language to be learned isthe only one permitted in the classroom have been discussed at some length in Chapter Three. The ideal situation would be one where--as described above--the learner's own language can be given ample room so as to encourage the development of thought, not simply the practice of a new code. However, there are situations where this may be difficult if not impossible, such as with multilingual, heterogeneous learning groups. What seems clear is that the fairly common practice of punishing the learner for using his/her own language through fining,

ridicule, or whatever, is detrimental. Jerome Bruner and Michael Cole, speaking of the cognitive effects of punishment, write:

> Even if a child could carry out the planning necessary for the most technically demanding kind of activity, he must not do so if he has been trained with the expectancy that such a skill will be punished or will, in any event, lead to some unforeseen difficulty. Consequently, the chances that the individual will work up his capacities for performance in the given domain are diminished.[10]

The threat of punishment encourages silence, whereas surely the best way to learn a new language is to use it, experiment with it, and apply it. It instills fear, rather than confidence, and fear, as is well known and shown by Anya, kills the ability to think, blocking creativity. The psychological effects can be farreaching, as Hymes asserts:

> Children may indeed be "linguistically deprived" if the language of their natural competence is not that of the school. . . . The situation of the children indeed is much worse than "deprivation" if their normal competence is punished in the school. One could speak more appropriately of "repression".[11]

A stronger statement of the same by M.A.K. Halliday: "A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin."[12]

Learning through error. The focus on the correct forms of the language resulted in a hyper-consciousness concerning the use of the language--a concern with its superficial

aspects, such as correct pronunciation, over its communicative purposes. Mastery of the new language must certainly involve mastery of forms, but the focus on correctness often impedes the very mastery one is aiming for.* Just as learners will benefit from discovering the differences between their own language and the one they are learning by being able to use their own, so they will learn the correct forms through discovering where their own use "errs".

Teachers should encourage liberal, active use of the language in whatever erroneous form the learner comes up with. Obviously this means establishing a kind of communicative learning environment where taking such risks is in no way threatening. For errors to be "useful", however, the teacher must take a new stance on "correctness" and "error" herself, for which the first step is to know as much as possible about the language of the learner so as to understand where the so-called "errors" come from.[14] Again, the problem lies directly with the attitude--and knowledge--of the teacher, as well as with his/her ability to structure the learning environment in appropriate ways.

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*Thomas Kochman comments on the problems involved: ". . . an oral language program that attempts to replace non-standard forms with socially preferred forms does not develop the child's ability to use language beyond what it is already capable of doing. It is concerned only with how a child says something, not with how well he or she says it".[13]

Language levels: appropriateness. Because language is both a reflection and determinant of social relationships, children quickly learn appropriate modes of communication in their own language. All people are masters of many "ways of speaking", as many as the various communities they belong to and the many relationships (peer, older/younger, stranger/friend, etc.) that are part of life. And yet we find in the account of many of the people interviewed that the only kind of English they learned was the highly formal variety, and in fact Marvina says that sometimes she speaks "as if it were the written language", the most formal and elaborated "way of speaking" available. If it did not have such serious result, in terms of severely limiting the learners' ability to communicate in the new language in any but formal situations, it would seem comic to consider such common distortions of communication as can be overheard in the classroom: Question: "Where is the book?" Answer: "The book is on the table."

It is of course impossible to simulate reality and the multiple relationships that determine appropriate levels of usage for the native speaker. However, beginning with the obvious constraint that distinguishes spoken communication from written (as above), the teacher should aim for teaching both colloquial as well as formal modes, doing so by allowing for varied levels of formality within the structure of

the learning situation and encouraging different kinds of communication.

Elaboration and logic. Certainly this study demonstrates the importance to all interviewed of their having learned to think and express themselves in what might be called "school language" or, to use Basil B. Bernstein's term, "the elaborated code".* A function of literacy itself, as well as of the mere fact of communicating about ideas and happenings occurring outside the immediate environment (e.g., the schoolroom), the necessity to elaborate on experience, as well as to receive such elaborated information, develops a kind of analytic thinking, a distancing from direct experience, that is qualitatively different from immediate "face to face" oral communication. The difference is not, as has sometimes been thought (in challenging Bernstein) a difference in the ability to think abstractly, but a difference in ways that abstraction comes to be developed and expressed.[15]

An example from the interviews appears in Rebeca's discussion of her frustration when having to express herself in English at what she calls the "level" of the formal classroom or work situation. Her school learning in English came

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*It would be interesting to explore the difference in the ways that each of the people I interviewed responded to the relatively informal interviews as a reflection of their various uses of the "elaborated" and "restricted" codes.

late, long after she had mastered the ability to communicate easily in informal situations. Thus her lack of access to the kind of vocabulary and organization of thought characteristic of "school language" in English comes directly up against the complex thoughts and knowledge that she possesses in her own language.

Two related points are to be made about the elaborated language in a schooling situation. First, that in and of itself it may be learned, like grammar, only superficially. Hymes points out, for example, that "not only is nonstandard English capable of logical cogency, but that standard English is capable of illogical use. Pungency and point are often on the side of the nonstandard, flaccid pleonasm on the side of the standard."[16]

Secondly, it may be learned to the exclusion of alternatives with the result that learners end up "thinking only one way". This was an issue of much importance to Nzamba and Phyl, who felt acutely the one-sided nature of the logic learned in the course of learning English in school. There are patterns of logic and approaches to analytic thought--and the expression of these--that are culturally distinct. The extent to which these distinctions are dependent on the difference between the passing of knowledge through an oral rather than a literate tradition is one factor to consider. Further, it is well known that among

literate, culturally different, groups there are differences in thought patterns (one stereotype is the contrast between the "cyclical" nature of Asian logic and the "linear" one of the West).

The recognition of such differences, and the possibilities for exploring these contrastively, may seem far-fetched where learners are engaged in mastering the new language and its accepted forms of thought and discourse. As both Nzamba and Phyl suggest, it may be that it is impossible to "think" in both ways--particularly as one continues to develop thought through writing and discourse in the new language rather than the other. This is a question I cannot answer. However, recognition of difference and exploration of such fundamental contrasts should be possible. Just as there is no universal truth that holds that all thought "begins" with a subject and "ends" with a predicate, though English grammar goes that way, so there is no absolute that logical thought must move inductively or deductively and needs to be expressed that way, that Western ways of categorizing and classification are necessarily the ways that reality is constructed, or are the best ways to describe it to another.

And yet so often written and oral discourse is taught in just this manner: variations in approach are called "wrong" and "disorganized" rather than explored as

alternatives possibly culturally determined. Instead, like syntactical skills, one form of logic is often dictated from the top down, the teacher manipulating discussion and organization of discourse according to such patterns--and usually within the context of subject matter she herself has chosen and delivers with her own opinions on the subject as "right" ways of looking at it.

For the liberation of thought from one-way patterns of expression and borrowed opinions, there must be altered structures of discourse. The focus of classroom discussion should be on the search for meaning with broad latitude given in the ways to best express it.

Language and realities. The elaborated code, the kind of logical thought, as well as the skills of the language taught through schooling are seldom done so in relation to realities. Thus Nzamba speaks of missing "the living aspect of my learning", Baldwin of learning only how to "imitate" the language, and Phyl of her experience as "miseducation" because of its denial of roots and repression of the "me in me".

Content. In part the problem of course lies with learning content and its relevance to the learner's familiar experience. It should be obvious that it is difficult for a learner to relate to material that is entirely foreign to his/her frame of reference; to do so successfully may reflect

considerable cultural alienation and personal repression, as has been discussed. But even the most relevant subject matter may be learned in imitative ways while the unfamiliar in the right setting, instead be made one's own.

Method. Traditional "top-down" modes of teaching and learning in the cross-cultural context help to promote the unquestioned acceptance of what is being taught and the values that come with it, discouraging investigation into one's own cultural and personal experience. Where inquiry and initiative is discouraged, how will the learner bring her own experience to bear within the school context? Nzamba puts it strongly: "Remember, the whole purpose was to completely reject Africanisms, that was the teaching. They didn't give you any leeway, any room to be yourself." Instead, as Phyl discusses at some length, a dialogical approach to learning where the realities are examined by learners and teacher alike connects language learning to the development of thought in both personal and social dimensions.

Through dialogue, learners and teachers alike can explore the realities of experience, such that the question of "culture" will be given its due complexity: not a dichotomy of the "good" and the "bad", the "only true reality" vs. the rest of the world, etc., but a totality combining the new with the familiar--all of which is available

for reflection and interpretation in the context of personal experience. Reflection on the very words one uses to describe reality--both "outer" reality and one's innermost thoughts and feelings--is a well recognized means for not only understanding these but sometimes in altering them both in terms of social awareness and action and of personal identity. This is, of course, the urgency behind George Orwell's now classic essay, "Politics and the English Language", the central message of Paulo Freire's pedagogy and Sylvia Ashton-Warner's approach to teaching Maori children in New Zealand and American children in Colorado.[17]

Styles of interaction: cultural contrasts. For the establistment of a dialogical learning situation, however, the language styles the learner is accustomed to outside of school must be taken into consideration. For if, as this study asserts, participation and inquiry are to be encouraged, it is also true that wehre the home environment discourages this, it will be difficult for learners to adjust. Ruth points this out in describing her own failure as an adult teacher using the modern, more participatory methods in the authoritarian context of her culture. Anya's account, on the other hand, raised the opposite problem, her home environment encouraging much active dialogue, her school instead requiring obedience and silence. Courtney B. Cazden writes that the "styles of language children learn at home may

inhibit their participation in the learning environment of the school or, to describe it in the reverse way, the learning environment of the school may repress rather than maximize the participatory skills of children or may favor some . . . at the cost of others." Commenting on studies made by Philips and Ward comparing home/school interactive styles, Cazden says, "In considering these learning environments, where quiet passivity is valued over active inquiry, we need to know not only whether the home and school function consistently, but also whether that functioning is conducive to learning," and adds that this is a "value-laden area", as indeed it is.[18]

Writing. This discussion so far has focused on problems of oral communication primarily with only peripheral mention of writing. The importance of writing cannot, however, be given enough attention. It is important in the articulation and development of thought/reflection, but poses special difficulties for persons writing in a language other than their own.

What we have already said about other aspects of language learning can be said here about the teaching of writing. Namely, there are two ways to go: either to teach writing in the traditional way which, it is well known, takes the learner's experience and private thought little into consideration, or do the latter. What Lev S. Vygotsky wrote

of the teaching of writing in 1920 is equally relevant today:

> Teaching of written language is based on artificial training. Such training requires an enormous amount of attention and effort on the part of teacher and pupil and thus becomes something self-contained, relegating living written language to the background [italics mine]. Instead of being founded on the needs of children as they naturally develop and on their own activity, writing is given to them from without, from the teacher's hands. This situation recalls the development of a technical skill such as piano-playing. The pupil develops finger dexterity and learns to strike the keys while reading music, but he is in no way involved in the essence of the music itself. Such one-sided enthusiasm for the mechanics of writing has had an impact not only on the practice of teaching but on the theoretical statement of the problem as well. Up to this point, psychology has conceived of writing as a complicated motor skill. It has paid remarkably little attention to the question of written language as such, that is, a particular system of symbols and signs whose mastery heralds a critical turning-point in the entire cultural development of the child.[19]

One of the reasons why the discussions in our interviews seldom dealt extensively with writing is that consistently none of my friends had anything good to say about it. Rebeca points out that while she used to love to write--notes to her friends, stories, love letters--she no longer does: why? "because I have to write about what someone else wants me to say." Ruth speaks of writing as a lesser of evils: an opportunity to communicate in English without being publicly criticized for possible errors, and significantly, useful as a means for finding out what the errors are. Anya found writing in English a burden of translation and a block to her own ideas. Phyl and Nzamba both recognize their writing as

so heavily invested with Western logic and thought structure as they learned it that they have difficulty communicating or understanding other approaches. Only Marvina, who has little ambivalence about her mastery of standard English, sees writing as an extension of her love of using words.

Doubtless learning to write well, even if within the context of "irrelevant" issues, has given all of these people benefit in mastering forms and structures of formal communication and in development of certain kinds of analytic thinking. The question rather is to what extent their mastery of this they feel is "their own".

In a discussion of the particular difficulties involved for persons writing in a language other than their own, Rebeca's remarks echo what more extensively we can find in Vygotsky's treatment on the subject.[20] Pointing out that writing requires great self-confidence, she explains:

> You really have to know, to be sure of what you're saying . . . to know that that's what you really want to say. It's not enough to say "I feel sad", you have to have in your mind what the definition of sadness is. You have to be careful, because not everybody means the same thing you mean by it. When you are writing, conveying to a reader what you want to say, it has to be clear. If it's not clear to you, how can it be clear for somebody else? And especially if you have to think in one language and transfer it to another language you are writing in. We have words that mean the same, but now you have to use them in different contexts. It's not easy, not easy.

Rebeca's recommendation to writing teachers teaching people like herself hits again at the point of relevance, at the

putting of personal meanings ahead of questions of form:

> If I were a teacher, first of all I would find out what their interests are and encourage them to take what they like, to develop some kind of writing, whatever comes to mind, and write it in whatever form they want.
>
> Don't tell them, because this is a writing class, you have to write a paragraph about this, you have to start a sentence like this and this, and you have to have a noun, a pronoun, a verb, and that. . . . I'd have them write what they want in the form that they want. If they just want to write it in a column, let them write it like that; if they want to write it with the paper upside down, let them write it like that! Until they develop that liking to write, don't force them. Afterwards they can learn those things.

Again, her thoughts find echo in Vygotsky's writings. Discussing the accomplishments of Maria Montessori, who found that children could learn to read and write far earlier than had previously been supposed, he says:

> If we ignore the correctness and beauty of the letters her children draw and focus on the content of what they write, we find messages like the following: "Happy Easter to Engineer Talani and Headmistress Montessori". "Best wishes to the director, the teacher and to Doctor Montessori, Children's House, Via Campania," and so forth. We do not deny the possibility of teaching reading and writing to pre-school children; we even regard it as desirable that a younger child enter school if he is able to read and write. But the teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something. If they are used only to write official greetings to the staff or whatever the teacher thinks up (and clearly suggests to them), then the exercise will be purely mechanical and may soon bore the child; his actuality will not be manifest in his writing and his budding personality will not grow.

He goes on:

> Reading and writing must be something the child needs. Here we have the most vivid example of the basic contradiction that appears in the teaching of writing not only in Montessori's school, but in most other schools as well,

> namely that writing is taught as a motor skill and not a complex cultural activity. Therefore the issue of teaching writing in preschool necessarily entails a second requirement: writing must be "relevant to life"--in the same way that we require a "relevant" arithmetic.[21]

Vygotsky's concern with "relevance"--literacy related to the learner's experience and needs--reflects his concern with the development of such public means of expression with thought and the "budding personality" itself. In an extraordinary passage, Richard Wright describes the same thing, from the point of view of the mature writer:

> I found out that writing of one's life was vastly different from speaking of it. I was rendering a close and emotionally connected account of experience and the ease I had had in speaking from notes at Fisk would not come again. I found that to tell the truth is the hardest thing on earth, harder than fighting in a war, harder than taking part in a revolution. If you try it, you will find that even if you succeed in discounting the attitudes of others to you and your life, you must wrestle with yourself most of all, fight with yourself; for there will surge up in you a strong desire to alter facts, to dress up your feelings. You'll find that there are many things that you don't want to admit about yourself and others. As your record shapes itself an awed wonder haunts you. And yet there is no more exciting an adventure than trying to be honest in this way. The clean strong feeling that sweeps you when you've done it makes you know that.[22]

Public and Private Expression: Skills Revisited

This study began with the proposal that current trends in language education are myopic in their view either of the complexity of the language learning process itself or of the needs of the learner in the cross-cultural context.

The overemphasis on the "Basics" and on skills learning, accompanied with traditional methods, it was suggested, can lead not only to problems in language acquisition itself, but also to problems of cultural and psychological identity.

Mastery of the skills of the prestige language, it goes without saying, is prerequisite for entry into the social and political arena in unequal societies, as the people interviewed here all acknowledge in their various ways. However, where skills are seen in light of the multi-dimensions of language in life experience, it becomes clear that much more needs to be considered in language education than linguistic structures alone. Further, the mechanistic modes of teaching/learning that perhaps seem most efficient are inadequate for building the ability to communicate in a variety of situations or for connecting language with the development of thought and personal expression.

In the learning of English for the people I interviewed, the connection between the public means of expression and the private world of experience was not made. Along with the denial of their primary language and culture in the learning context went also the denial or repression of private thought and feeling on certain levels. As we have seen throughout the study, there were a variety of responses: in some cases, resistance to learning the language at all; for some, lack of confidence in self-expression in the new

language, while for others, self-consciousness and distance from the original; for all, there were degrees of cultural alienation and psychological conflict. It is impossible to consider their stories overall without appreciating the particular difficulties and sometimes painful aspects of their experience.

In considering the complexity of the cross-cultural experience, and in particular the risks it holds for cultural and self-identity, it might seem that learning the prestige language is but one of many obstacles to be overcome. However, it may also be a principal means for resolving some of the conflicts that cultural transition necessarily entails. Given appropriate methods and attitudes, the new language may be brought to bear on the realities of the learner's experience, with the affirmation of the original language and culture as well as of the new and unfamiliar. Encouragement of self-expression within the context of the development of thought and of communication will, this study suggests, contribute directly to mastery of the forms of the language itself, while at the same time providing the basis for cultural and personal integration.

FOOTNOTES

[1]W. Walker, "An Experiment in Programmed Cross-Cultural Education", quoted in Courney B. Cazden, "Problems for Education: Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment in Language as a Human Problem, eds. Morton Bloomfield and Einar Haugen (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), p. 141

[2]Geneva Smitherman, "What Go Round Come Round: King in Perspective," Harvard Educational Review 51 (February, 1981), 40-56.

[3]Dell Hymes, Introduction to Functions of Language in the Classroom, eds. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John and Dell Hymes (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1972), p. xxi.

[4]Robert V. Dumont, Jr., "Learning English and How to be Silent: Studies in Sioux and Cherokee Classrooms," in Functions of Language in the Classroom, pp. 344-370.

[5]Theodore Brameld, The Remaking of a Culture (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1959), p. 214.

[6]Hymes, p. xlii.

[7]Einar Haugen, "The Curse of Babel," in Language as a Human Problem, p. 41.

[8]Hymes, p. xlii.

[9]Ali A. Mazrui, The Political Sociology of the English Language (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1972), p. 13. See also, Chapter 4, "The Racial Boundaries of the English Language", pp. 69-85.

[10]Jerome Bruner and Michael Cole, "Cultural Differences and Inferences About Psychological Processes," American Psychologist 26(1971):872.

[11]Hymes, p. xxi.

[12]M.A.K. Halliday, "The Users and Uses of Language," in Joshua A. Fishman, ed. Readings in the Sociology of Language (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1968), p. 165.

[13]Thomas Kochman, "Black American Speech Events and a Language Program for the Classroom," in Functions of Language in the Classroom, p. 229.

[14]See, for example, Mina P. Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), and Sara D'Eloia et al., eds., "Error": Journal of Basic Writing 1 (Spring, 1974).

[15]Basil B. Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and Socialization," in Language and Social Context, ed. Pier Paulo Giglioli (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 157-178; William Labov, "The Logic of Nonstandard English," in Language and Social Context, pp. 179-215.

[16]Hymes, p. xliv.

[17]George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," A Collection of Essays (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1954), pp. 162-176; Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973) and Education for Critical Consciousness (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Spearpoint: Teacher in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1963 and Teacher (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

[18]Cazden, pp. 143, 147-148.

[19]Lev. S. Vygotsky, Mind in Society, eds. Michael Cole et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 105-106.

[20]See Vygotsky, Thought and Language, trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1962), pp. 142-153.

[21]Vygotsky, Mind, pp. 117-118.

[22]Richard Wright, American Hunger (New York: Harper Row, 1977).

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